

The Knowledge Objection
Beth Barker, 2.15.24

Abstract. A common objection to Gilbert Ryle's (1946, 1949) view of knowledge-how claims that Ryle's 'knowledge-how' fails to be a kind of *knowledge*. I call this the knowledge objection (KO). If its proponents are right, Ryle's account of knowledge-how is disappointing and he fails to distinguish the two types of *knowledge* he is known for having distinguished. I develop a novel response by conceding KO's main criticism: Ryle *doesn't* offer a view of knowledge-how as a kind of knowledge. I argue that Ryle's point was never about a kind of knowledge, but intelligence. My arguments have significance for the contemporary debate about know-how, since the debate is still shaped by KO. Additionally, my view reveals a way in which we still treat an *intellectualist* view of intelligence as default. Appreciating Ryle's point about know-how shows that this view doesn't deserve default status. It requires argument.

Keywords: Gilbert Ryle, intelligence, knowledge-how

I. Introduction

This paper dissolves a common objection to Gilbert Ryle's view of knowledge-how. The objection is that what Ryle calls 'knowledge-how' is only knowledge so-called (see Kremer 2016, Stanley 2011). Responses on Ryle's behalf have tried to show that knowledge-how *is* knowledge. It's just a kind of knowledge without propositional content (Hornsby 2011), or knowledge itself is just a capacity to get things right (Kremer 2017). Instead of offering a Rylean solution to the objection, I propose a novel response: Rylean knowledge-how *isn't* a kind of knowledge. I show that establishing this conclusion is the point of Ryle's argument for 'knowledge-how' in the first place.

I show that the objection misses the point, so it's a mistake to try to meet its demands (either on Ryle's behalf or in contemporary views of know-how). To show that it misses the point, I develop a picture of *how* Ryle argues for his famous knowledge-how and -that distinction. On this picture, Ryle distinguished two types of *intelligence*, not knowledge, and what he calls 'knowledge-how' is just a form of intelligence we (theorists) tend to overlook. It turns out that what Ryle called 'knowledge-how' *can't* be a kind of knowledge, or else it fails to be the overlooked kind of intelligence that it was Ryle's aim to draw our attention to. To make matters worse, we continue to look past it by demanding it take the familiar form of knowledge.¹

¹ There are some points of similarity between the view I develop and Jennifer Hornsby's (2011). The significant difference is that I concede Ryle's view of knowledge-how isn't a view of knowledge; Hornsby argues it is. Greg Sax (2010) has the only other argument I know of to the effect that Ryle's 'knowledge-how' isn't supposed to be knowledge. Sax argues Ryle's use of 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' is philosophically idiomatic (p. 512), and I think he's right. (Cf. Will Small 2017, where Small argues that Ryle's main contribution is to action theory, not epistemology).

The objection I dissolve matters to how we regard Ryle’s view—whether he does distinguish knowledge-how from -that, as he’s known for doing—as well as how we think about knowledge and intelligence generally. Contemporary views of knowledge-how are still shaped by this objection: they try to maintain the core of Ryle’s account while showing that we should regard ability (with the right bells and whistles) as a kind of knowledge, properly speaking (see esp. Löwenstein 2017, 2021; Elzinga 2021, Worthmann 2021).

In the next section, I’ll motivate the objection. In section III, I’ll paint the picture of Ryle’s view that shows the objection misses the point. In section IV, I’ll respond to alternatives to my view, which offer the possibility of solving instead of dissolving the objection. In section V, I’ll conclude with remarks about the significance of all of this to how we think of knowledge-how and intelligence generally.

II. The knowledge objection

The objection I call ‘KO’ comes in a few varieties. I’ll present two and adopt the more general (and so broadly applicable) one. Here’s the simplest. Jason Stanley and John W. Krakauer (2013) state that “knowledge is, minimally, a state with propositional content, one that is suitable for use in guiding action” (1), and that “Ryle argued that skilled action was...the manifestation of a non-propositional state that he labeled *knowledge how*” (2). Ryle is not Stanley’s and Krakauer’s target in this particular paper, but they do take it for granted that (1) knowledge is a state with propositional content, and (2) Ryle’s ‘knowledge-how’ is not a state with propositional content. So, (3) it follows that Ryle’s ‘knowledge-how’ is knowledge only so-called.² Independently, Stanley (2011) has argued for (1)–(3). He charges Ryle with treating ‘knowledge’ as ambiguous between the state with propositional content, and the state without.³

However, it is at best contentious whether what Ryle called ‘knowledge-how’ is a state without propositional content.⁴ This version of KO starts off on the wrong foot because it assumes Ryle rejects

² The same line of argument can be extracted from the first paragraph of Stanley and Williamson (2001): “According to Gilbert Ryle...knowledge-how is an ability, which is in turn a complex of dispositions. Knowledge-that, on the other hand, is not an ability, or anything similar. Rather, Knowledge-that is a relation between a thinker and a true proposition” (411).

³ Ephraim Glick (2012) has argued that Ryle’s view results in polysemy, not ambiguity, and, moreover, we shouldn’t be bothered by this. Just as we can use ‘pain’ to talk about two different kinds of pain—emotional and physical—we can use ‘knows’ to ascribe two different kinds of knowledge—one with propositional content, the other without.

⁴ Among those who count themselves friends of Ryle’s view: Hornsby (2011) argues it *must* be a state without propositional content; Michael Kremer (2017) argues it can be; David Löwenstein (2017, 2021) argues it cannot be, and Will Small (2017) argues that the matter of propositionality is beside Ryle’s point. I think it safe to say that Ryle does *not* have the anti-propositional-content view that Stanley ascribes to him (as do Bengson and Moffett 2011a and 2011b; for response, see

the idea that propositional content is relevant to knowing how. If there is a version of the objection that doesn't so blatantly ascribe a contentious view to Ryle, we should prefer that, and there is. This version of the objection takes aim at anti-intellectualism more broadly, where anti-intellectualism is the view that

x knows how to φ in virtue of x 's having some power—some ability or disposition—to φ , rather than propositional attitudes. (Bengson and Moffett 2011b, 162)

Call this view AI. In the know-how literature, Ryle is understood to be endorsing something like AI. Although I don't think this is quite right,⁵ I think it safe enough to attribute AI to Ryle, since what is important to Ryle's view of knowing-how is that one knows how *in virtue of* having an ability or disposition of some kind.⁶ This formulation allows us to leave aside the question regarding the role of propositional attitudes.

Here is how the objection comes into view. Bengson and Moffett (2011b) take the following theses to be “attractive but prima facie incompatible theses about knowing how”:

- i. Knowing how is not merely a kind of knowing that.
- ii. Knowing how is practical: it bears a substantive connection to action.
- iii. Knowing how is a cognitive achievement: its status as a piece of practical *knowledge* is not merely coincidental. (p. 165)

Bengson and Moffett argue that their view is uniquely capable of respecting all three theses, but the point here is that AI—and so Ryle's own view—fails by (iii): “insofar as *anti-intellectualist* theses narrowly tie knowing how to mere behavioral-dispositional states or powers, they have a tendency to falter on—or render mysterious—(iii)” (pp. 165–66). The idea is that if one knows how *in virtue of* having an ability, then it isn't clear how knowing how turns out to be a cognitive achievement. Digesting, for example, is not a cognitive achievement—it's the kind of thing that the anti-intellectualist should want to rule out as *not* a case of knowing how, but it's not clear their view can.⁷

Kremer 2017 and Small 2017). But nor does Ryle make it easy to determine whether (never mind how!) propositional content plays a role in knowing how. On the reading I articulate, it turns out the matter of propositional content is beside his point, but I won't argue for this just yet.

⁵ Kremer (2017) argues Ryle would not have considered himself an anti-intellectualist, and what Kremer means by 'anti-intellectualist' is different than what folks in the know-how literature tend to mean by 'anti-intellectualist'.

⁶ Later, I will call this a capacity, but I'm happy to trade 'capacity' for 'ability' or 'disposition'. The differences between these states won't matter to my argument.

⁷ The example might seem silly, but it has been taken seriously. See Stanley and Williamson (2001). For response: Alva Noë (2005). For response to Noë: Yuri Cath (2013).

Granting that (iii) conflicts with AI, why should the proponent of AI take (iii) seriously? Bengson and Moffett present (iii) as a *desideratum*, and it is widely accepted as such in the know-how literature,⁸ but Julia Annas provides a sort of argument for it by appealing to the explanatory purpose of ‘knowing how’:

Either “knowing how” involves “knowing that” or it does not. If it does not, then what we think of as practical knowledge is being construed as a kind of inarticulate practical knack, an ability to manipulate the world which is not at a sufficiently rational level to be judged epistemically. This, however, would amount to saying that there is no such thing as practical expertise, only knacks—that there is no significant difference between the inarticulate practitioner and the expert in the field. (2001, 248)

Similarly, Jason Stanley (2011a) argues that knowledge-how makes the difference between skilled and unskilled actions and that, in order to make this difference, knowledge-how must be a kind of knowledge (specifically, an attitude with propositional content). Annas and Stanley agree, then, that our notion of knowing-how should help us distinguish intelligent actions from practical knacks. And, in order to do this, knowing-how must be at a “sufficiently rational level to be judged epistemically.” (Or, more carefully, knowing-how must be the sort of thing that underlies *actions* that can be judged on epistemic bases.)⁹

The resulting picture is that knowing-how should amount to a cognitive–epistemic achievement—something knowledge-like—and what Ryle calls knowing-how—an ability or disposition—fails to amount to this.

This objection matters not just to how we understand Ryle. Contemporary views of know-how that take after Ryle’s are still shaped by it. These views take the core of Ryle’s view—that one *knows how to ϕ* in virtue of having an ability or disposition to ϕ —and aim to show that an ability with the right bells and whistles amounts to something knowledge-like. As they state their aim, these views intellectualize knowledge-how without over-intellectualizing it (Löwenstein 2017, 2021, and Elzinga

⁸ An objection to (iii) from Baron Reed: it seems there are some instances of know-how we wouldn’t consider cognitive achievements. A good surgeon knows how to perform a certain operation, but they also know how to botch that operation. Would we really want to say that their knowing how to botch an operation is a cognitive achievement? I think Baron is right that we would not. What I can say on behalf of Bengson’s and Moffett’s *desideratum* is that the surgeon knows how to botch the operation in virtue of something that *is* a cognitive achievement: knowing how to do it right. I suspect this reply is subject to further objections. Ultimately, though, I want to show that even *if* (iii) is right, it fails to constitute an objection to Ryle’s view. I think (iii) is worth attention here if only because it’s been so widely endorsed.

⁹ I can also imagine an argument for (iii) that starts with the idea that knowing-how explains success (actual or counterfactual; for arguments, see Hawley 2003, Pavese 2021). If knowing-how explains success, one might expect knowing-how to be a cognitive or epistemic achievement.

2021). If my argument in the following sections is sound, ‘intellectualizing’ know-how already concedes too much to the intellectualist. I will say why in section V.

III. What Ryle calls ‘knowledge-how’

Ryle is known for distinguishing what he called ‘knowing how’ from ‘knowing that’, for distinguishing two types of *knowledge*. However, KO says that what Ryle calls ‘knowing how’ fails to amount to a cognitive–epistemic achievement, so it fails to be a kind of knowledge. My aim is to show that the objection doesn’t apply in the first place. What Ryle called ‘knowing how’, or ‘knowledge-how’ wasn’t *meant* to be a cognitive–epistemic achievement. In a slogan, what Ryle called ‘knowledge-how’ *can’t* be knowledge,¹⁰ so it’s no failure of his view that it isn’t.

I argue for this slogan by shifting attention to *how* Ryle distinguishes knowing how from knowing that. Here’s the bird’s-eye view of his argument. Ryle’s begins with a *desideratum*: explain how knowledge of facts gets implemented in action. More knowledge of facts (the presumed view) can’t explain this, so something *else* must. Ryle recommends we call this something else ‘knowledge-how’. The key point is that, in order to meet the *desideratum* Ryle started with, ‘knowledge-how’ can’t be a kind of propositional knowledge, or ‘knowledge of facts’.

At this point, this picture leaves open the possibility that ‘knowledge-how’ is a kind *knowledge*, so long as the knowledge isn’t propositional knowledge (Hornsby 2011 draws this conclusion). However, I don’t think this is the way to understand Ryle’s view. I’ll articulate two reasons for this: (1) to my knowledge, Ryle never gives an account of non-propositional knowledge (which Hornsby acknowledges). (2) It’s clear that Ryle is consistently concerned with how we conceive of *intelligence* (see Small 2017—Ryle’s point is not epistemological so much as action-theoretical). Result: On my positive view, Ryle distinguishes two kinds of *intelligence*, not knowledge, and trying to close the distance between the one form of intelligence (propositional knowledge) and the other (‘know-how’) defeats the purpose of the very distinction he meant to make.

I said that what would matter first is *how* Ryle arrives at his distinction between knowing-that and -how. He does this in the context of his argument against what he calls the ‘intellectualist legend’, or the ‘prevailing doctrine’, and this context matters more than is typically acknowledged. So, I’ll begin where Ryle does. Ryle opens his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, “Knowing How and Knowing That,” by stating that its purpose is to “exhibit part of the logical behaviour of the several

¹⁰ I know of only one other endorsement of this claim, for which, see Sax (2010).

concepts of intelligence, as these occur when we characterize either practical or theoretical activities as clever, wise, prudent, skilful, etc.” (1946, 1). He does this by taking aim at the ‘prevailing doctrine’ about intelligence, which 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. (1)

Ryle takes aim at this doctrine by showing that “intelligence is directly exercised as well in some practical performances as in some theoretical performances and that an intelligent performance need incorporate no ‘shadow-act’ of contemplating regulative propositions” (2).¹¹ His crucial claim is twofold: first, thinking (“theoretical performance”) is not always intelligent,¹² and, second, practical activities sometimes exhibit intelligence directly (i.e., *not* in virtue of first being “thought through”). Very basically, the argument to come is that if thinking itself is not always intelligent, then the *reason* it is intelligent (when it is) can’t be thinking itself. Because the intelligence of thinking requires explanation, it cannot be what explains the intelligence of other, practical activities.¹³ So, the intellectualist is on the hook for explaining intelligence another way.

Take first Ryle’s point that thinking itself may be stupidly done. He illustrates this by contrasting two chess players:

What facts or what sorts of facts are known to the sensible which are not known to the silly? For example, what truths does the clever chess-player know which would be news to his stupid opponent? Obviously there is no truth or set of truths of which we could say “If only the stupid player had been informed of them, he would be a clever player,” or “When once he had been apprised of these truths he would play well.” We can imagine a clever player generously imparting to his stupid opponent so many rules, tactical maxims, “wrinkles,” etc., that he could think of no more to tell him; his opponent might accept and memorise all of them, and be able and ready to recite them correctly on demand. Yet he might still play chess stupidly, that is, be unable intelligently to apply the maxims, etc.

¹¹ At any point, it is likely that the intellectualist view will sound like a straw man. While I’m concerned only with how Ryle makes his argument and not whether he takes aim at a straw man, I recommend Kremer (2017), where Kremer puts Ryle’s work in the historical context required to show that this was the prevailing view of his time, especially in psychology (e.g., in the work of G. F. Stout). Anyway, I also tend to think that Ryle is drawing out an assumption that intellectualists weren’t aware of making and, to do so, he exaggerates the view to make it obvious. In *The Concept of Mind*, he admits that he describes intellectualism “with deliberate abusiveness, as ‘the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’” (1949, 15–16).

¹² Ryle uses various terms for the theoretical operations he has in mind (e.g., ‘ratiocinating’, ‘contemplating regulative propositions’, ‘thinking-operations’). For simplicity, I will stick with ‘thinking’ as shorthand for ‘theoretical operations’.

¹³ This is what Ryle elsewhere calls the “crucial objection” to intellectualism, that “the consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle” (1949, 30).

If thinking is always (or by its nature) an intelligent activity, then supplying two chess players with all of the same maxims of chess should result in two equally competent players. Ryle's chess players are not equally competent. One, despite being equipped with all the right maxims, is thinking poorly about them. The other is thinking well, or intelligently. So, Ryle's point is that there is a difference between the chess players—we evaluate the intelligence of each differently—even when their epistemic statuses are identical in the relevant sense (i.e., they know all the same maxims). The interim conclusion is that quality of thinking has something to do with our evaluations of intelligence.

The intellectualist will want to sidestep Ryle's 'quality of thinking' move, since, on their view, thinking is by its nature intelligent. They will respond by pointing out that the stipulation that the players are epistemically identical in the relevant sense doesn't hold. What the less-clever player is missing is knowledge of 'bridge maxims', maxims that indicate *when* it is appropriate to apply a given first-order maxim. If the player knew these, they'd be epistemically identical to the other player, and so their chess playing would be intelligent. However, Ryle points out that even if the right maxim occurs to the player at the right moment, "he might be too stupid to follow it" (6).¹⁴ Two possibilities here: he might fail to *see* that the appropriate maxim is the appropriate one, or he might just fail to follow it despite intending to. These two possibilities remain no matter how many orders of bridge-maxims the intellectualist adds. So, adding more knowledge of facts to the less-clever player's repertoire won't resolve the difference between their performance and the clever player's. Here is how Ryle makes the point: "In other words it requires intelligence not only to discover truths, but also to apply them, and knowing how to apply truths cannot, without setting up an infinite process, be reduced to knowledge of some extra bridge-truths" (6).

What *does* explain the difference between the players? *This* is what Ryle is after—his *desideratum* is to explain this difference, since he has argued the intellectualist can't. And his proposal is deceptively simple. One just has a capacity that the other lacks—the capacity to *apply what they know*, which entails the ability to recall the maxim appropriate for the circumstances *and* to follow it. It's this capacity that Ryle often calls 'knowing how', but he doesn't offer us reason to think the capacity is a kind of *knowledge*, but a kind of *intelligence*. Ryle thinks of the exercise of this capacity as an exercise of intelligence. Why? Well, it's what makes the difference between the chess players, and one of the

¹⁴ We could put his point in this (albeit unkind) way: that the player is stupid but not ignorant. The difference between stupidity and ignorance is of "first rate importance" to Ryle: "There is no incompatibility between being well-informed and being silly, and a person who has a good nose for arguments or jokes may have a bad head for facts" (1949, 25–26). Ignorance is lacking knowledge of facts, stupidity is dealing with facts (thinking) poorly.

players is intelligent in a way the other isn't yet. So, the difference itself is a matter of intelligence. What's more: we already think of this difference in terms of intelligence. This is why we should resist the intellectualist's claim that 'Intelligence' is the special faculty responsible only for *knowing*, or *apprehending truths*.

One might still wonder what it is that makes the exercise of the capacity to *apply what one knows* an intelligent exercise. Ryle has good reason to dismiss our wondering about this. Recall that he has argued that theoretical operations (like thinking) cannot explain intelligence since they are also intelligently or stupidly performed. He knows better than to claim that, instead, *practical* operations explain intelligence. This would be to commit the same kind of mistake the intellectualist commits, albeit in the opposite direction.¹⁵ I propose that we regard his solution as treating intelligence as explanatorily basic: it's not in virtue of anything *else* that we think of the application of maxims as intelligent. It's a contingent feature of *both* theoretical and practical operations (not all *thinking* or *doing* is intelligently done), and, what's more, we recognize it when we see it. We recognize the difference between the chess players and think of that difference in terms of intelligence—one is a more intelligent player than the other. So, exercising the capacity to implement knowledge (apply what one knows) *just is* exercising intelligence.¹⁶

At this point, what is crucial to my argument is in view. I am arguing that we should read Ryle's argument in this way: as showing that knowledge of facts (propositional knowledge) can't satisfy the *desideratum*—to explain how knowledge of facts gets implemented in action—so something else must explain this. This something else is just a capacity of some kind. The exercise of this capacity is an exercise of intelligence, *not* in virtue of further theoretical or practical operations. Ryle's argument identifies something that's missing from the intellectualist's thinking about *intelligence*: the capacity to implement what one knows. Later, Ryle calls this capacity 'knowing how'. Contrast will help clarify what's important here. What Ryle does *not* do is start with ascriptions of knowing how and try to show, from there, that what we ascribe when we ascribe knowing-how is a capacity (or ability or disposition). He starts with a *desideratum* and shows that the prevailing theory can't satisfy it. In effect, he argues for an existential claim: there must be some x such that x makes the difference between 'clever' and

¹⁵ This point is inspired by Kremer (2017).

¹⁶ There's another reason that the exercise of this capacity is intelligent, but the argument comes later in Ryle's body of work (see his 1962). Roughly, the idea is that we recognize each other as rational creatures because we recognize each other's activities as exercises of intelligence—we hold each other to standards and criteria in a way we don't hold other creatures to standards or criteria (e.g., just as silly to say a lion knows how to play chess as to point out that the lion doesn't; we hold a lion to no standards or criteria regarding chess).

‘stupid’ performance. x must be a capacity (or ability or disposition). Call this capacity ‘knowing how’. This is how Ryle arrives at his distinction between knowing how and knowing that.

What does Ryle lose if this capacity fails to amount to a kind of knowledge, or epistemic achievement? This is where the context of his distinguishing ‘knowing how’ from ‘knowing that’ is crucial. I’ve presented Ryle’s distinction emphasizing intelligence, and with good reason. Ryle is primarily concerned with *how we evaluate intelligent performance*. His stated aim was to discover the logical behaviour of intelligence epithets, such as ‘silly’, ‘clever’, ‘witty’, or ‘stupid’—what makes it appropriate for us to use them to describe people and the things they manage to do? We think of people *as clever or witty* not just in virtue of their knowledge of facts, but in virtue of *what they do* with their knowledge of facts. So, intelligence corresponds to something besides (in addition to) knowledge of facts. This is his crucial point against the intellectualist, who maintains that ‘Intelligence’ is a special faculty that has *only to do with knowledge of facts, or apprehension of truths*.¹⁷ It’s not clear to me that it costs Ryle anything to concede that this exercise of intelligence fails to be the exercise of a ‘cognitive–epistemic achievement’, so long as it is nonetheless an exercise of *intelligence*.

Where does this leave Ryle with respect to KO? KO insists that what Ryle calls ‘knowing how’ should be a cognitive–epistemic achievement. Two possibilities here: on the one hand, it is possible that the capacity itself is a cognitive–epistemic achievement. This will just depend on what we mean by ‘epistemic’. The capacity clearly has epistemic benefits: very basically, if one has the capacity to implement knowledge, one has the ability to answer *whether P*.¹⁸ So, it helps make information exchange, and, thereby, epistemic participation possible. As for the ‘achievement’ bit, Ryle clearly thought that the relevant kind of capacity is something *learned*, or acquired through training (as opposed to drilling). If Ryle is right, we might very well think of the capacity he calls ‘knowing how’ as an achievement with epistemic benefits. But it is not my aim to show that the proponent of KO should be satisfied with this account of Rylean knowing how as a cognitive–epistemic achievement. So, presuming they will not be, what we have on the other hand is that KO just doesn’t apply. We’ve settled that what Ryle called ‘knowing how’ *must* be a kind of capacity (or disposition or ability)¹⁹ and

¹⁷ He states clearly in *The Concept of Mind* that his aim is “to correct from the start the intellectualist doctrine which tries to define intelligence in terms of the apprehension of truths, instead of the apprehension of truths in terms of intelligence” (1949, 27).

¹⁸ I think this follows, even if one can’t articulate P, etc., etc. For an account that connects know-how with the ability to answer, see Joshua Habgood-Coote (2019).

¹⁹ I acknowledge there are meaningful differences between capacities, tendencies, dispositions, and abilities—and Rylean views differ regarding which of these ‘knowing how’ is—but I won’t wade into the differences. I am treating ‘capacity’ as coarse-grained, since what matters is just that it’s not what the proponent of KO thinks of as a kind of knowledge or epistemic achievement.

not a kind of propositional knowledge in order to satisfy the *desideratum* he started with. The proponent of KO might quibble with the wisdom of calling this capacity *knowledge how*,²⁰ but expecting Rylean ‘knowledge how’ to look more like knowledge misses the point of his argument in the first place: to draw our attention to a kind of intelligence that is explanatorily basic—something that *doesn’t* look like our familiar notion of knowledge.

Here’s a possible objection, inspired by Jason Stanley (2011b): Ryle assumes propositional knowledge to be behaviorally inert, and he’s not entitled to this assumption. Propositional knowledge that P entails the ability (a capacity!) to, e.g., answer *whether P*, if asked. So, there’s no need to distinguish another capacity from the capacity that comes with propositional knowledge. This targets Ryle’s distinction and says he’s splitting hairs between a bad notion of knowledge (the one that’s behaviorally inert) and the capacity to implement that knowledge. A good notion of knowledge *isn’t* behaviorally inert, so there’s no reason to distinguish a capacity and call it ‘knowledge how’. This might be right. I have two things to say in response. I’m not concerned with defending the soundness of Ryle’s distinction here, so Stanley may as well be right. If he is, my point remains: what Ryle called ‘knowledge how’ isn’t itself a kind of knowledge. The other thing to say is that we’d have to return to the chess players. If it’s conceptually possible that both *know* all the same maxims—they’re epistemically identical—then Ryle *is* making a meaningful distinction—there’s something one chess player has that the other doesn’t, and *that’s* worth accounting for in our theories of intelligence.

IV. KO solutions

My aim so far has been to present a picture of Ryle’s argument for ‘knowing how’ that shows that what Ryle called ‘knowing how’ *cannot* be a kind of knowledge because it *must* be a kind of intelligent capacity (in order to meet the *desideratum* he started with). Because KO demands that ‘knowing how’ be a kind of knowledge, or cognitive–epistemic achievement, it misses the point of Ryle’s distinction—it fails to recognize the *desideratum* Ryle started with, and so the aim of his account. So, it fails to constitute an objection to Ryle’s view.

Here I address two possible responses to KO on Ryle’s behalf. These are attempts to solve the objection instead of dissolving it. One is from Jennifer Hornsby (2011), and the other from Michael Kremer (2017). I show that neither is to be preferred over the picture of Ryle’s view I’ve developed.

²⁰ I have two ideas here: (1) Sax (2010) argues that Ryle’s use of ‘knowledge-how’ and ‘-that’ is idiomatic, and I’m happy with that. (2) Kremer (2021) attributes Ryle’s inspiration for the term ‘knowledge-how’ to his friend (a student of Wittgenstein’s), Margaret MacDonald.

Hornsby argues that Ryle distinguished a non-propositional form of knowledge from the more familiar knowledge with propositional content: “Ryle’s central claim...was that the use of propositional knowledge requires a sort of knowledge that could not itself be propositional” (80). Hornsby’s argument has points of similarity with mine: she also claims that anyone who expects Rylean ‘knowledge how’ to look more like propositional knowledge misses the point of Ryle’s argument against intellectualism. As she puts it, Ryle’s opponents “are complicit in a sort of Cartesianism which it was the purpose of *The Concept of Mind* to trounce” (80; as for opponents, Hornsby has Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson in mind in particular; see their 2001). But if Hornsby is right, Ryle might have a solution to KO: knowledge-how *is* a kind of knowledge, but it’s non-propositional. A few problems confront Hornsby’s solution: as Hornsby acknowledges,²¹ Ryle doesn’t give an account of this non-propositional knowledge as such, so it’s tough to defend a Rylean view of non-propositional knowledge.²² I also think this puts the Rylean in a more difficult position than my view does: the cost of Hornsby’s solution is that Ryle must make good on the promise of a non-propositional kind of knowledge, whereas my view only requires something of Ryle’s opponent—to acknowledge that intelligence isn’t exhausted by *knowledge of facts*. On Hornsby’s view, Ryle advances a positive claim about the nature of knowledge; on my view, Ryle advances a negative claim about the nature of intelligence. Since Ryle makes no argument for the former, my view has the advantage.

I also suspect I have some allies here. Will Small (2017) argues that Ryle makes more of a contribution to action theory than any kind of epistemology. And Greg Sax (2010) argues that Ryle’s use of ‘knowledge-how’ is idiomatic. In favor of the latter: Ryle uses ‘knowledge’ and ‘intelligence’ interchangeably. (A glib way to make the point: it seems Ryle thought that ‘knowing how and knowing that’ made for a catchier title than ‘knowing facts isn’t all there is to intelligence’. Who can blame him?)

Kremer (2016), on the other hand, does develop an account of knowledge on Ryle’s behalf. Kremer argues that Ryle viewed knowledge as *a capacity to get things right*. And knowledge-how and -that are two manifestations of this capacity. Knowledge-how is the capacity to bring one’s performance up to relevant standards, or to meet criteria. Knowledge-that is the capacity to act for reasons that are *facts about the world*.²³ In effect, this sidesteps the question of propositionality—whether propositional attitudes are involved in either knowing-how or -that is, I think, difficult to determine and beside the

²¹ Hornsby points out that “[Ryle’s] short section called ‘The Positive Account of Knowing How’ does not even pretend to start on such an account: it is focused on just one example” (82; see Ryle 1949, pp. 40–41).

²² She does offer reason to think that Ryle was thinking of the *ability to reason* in epistemic terms (see p. 86). The trouble is that this doesn’t show that all instances of what Ryle called ‘knowing how’ (other abilities) are as epistemically relevant as the particular ability that’s central to Hornsby’s discussion, the ability to reason.

²³ Kremer’s understanding of Ryle’s ‘knowledge-that’ is inspired by Hyman (1999).

point. I could argue that Kremer's interpretation of Ryle comes at the cost of Ryle's distinction between knowledge-how and -that, because I think it does.²⁴ But here I want to grant that there is a sense in which Kremer might be right—say that the capacity view *is* Ryle's positive view of knowledge. If this does come at the cost of Ryle's distinction, Kremer could respond in this way: Ryle, in his argument against intellectualism, was arguing against the *intellectualist's* notion of knowledge, which is behaviorally inert and requires propositional attitudes. So we should understand Ryle as *replacing* the intellectualist's notion of knowledge with his own, according to which knowledge is neither behaviorally inert nor requires propositional attitudes. For Kremer, then, it's important to distinguish Ryle's negative argument from his positive account. This is reasonable. However, we don't have reason to think that Ryle *does* mean to replace the intellectualist's notion of knowledge with his own view. As far as I can find, it seems just as likely to me that Ryle accepted the intellectualist's view of knowledge and only had in mind to reject such a narrow view of the nature of intelligence. Since I've shown that what Ryle cares about in distinguishing knowledge-how from -that is how we think of intelligence, I (again) think my view has the advantage here.

Finally, I'll just add one worry about Kremer's solution: Even on Kremer's interpretation, it's not clear that Ryle's positive view can meet KO's demands. What Kremer identifies as knowledge-that, on Ryle's view, is a kind of capacity to act for reasons that are facts about the world. But whether this capacity amounts to a cognitive–epistemic achievement depends on how one acquires it, as well as what it entails. These two aspects of the account would need to rule out the sense in which I have the capacity to act for reasons I have no cognizance of.²⁵ What does it mean to act *for a reason*? Of course, Ryle's account of knowledge-that is not easy to suss out, but without these finer details, Ryle is still stuck with the charge that what he calls knowledge (this time, both -how *and* -that!) is knowledge only so-called.

V. Concluding remarks

I have argued that Ryle's 'knowledge-how' isn't a kind of knowledge, and that his argument for the distinction between knowledge-how and -that is an argument for an overlooked kind of intelligence:

²⁴ In his Presidential Address, Ryle wants "to turn the tables and to prove that knowledge-how cannot be defined in terms of knowledge-that and further, that knowledge-how is a concept logically prior to the concept of knowledge-that" (4–5). I think it clear that on Kremer's view Rylean knowledge-how depends on Rylean knowledge-that, and Rylean knowledge-how *can* be defined in terms of Rylean knowledge-that.

²⁵ Consider, e.g., Davidson's prowler: my flipping a switch turns on a light and thereby scares off a prowler outside. In a certain sense, I had the capacity to act for the reason that there's a prowler outside, even though I had no idea there was a prowler outside. I only meant to turn on a light.

the capacity to *apply* or *implement* what one knows. So, Ryle can meet KO head on: it costs him nothing to concede that what he calls knowledge *isn't* a kind of knowledge. In fact, if what we mean by 'knowledge' is a kind of state that is 'behaviorally inert' (doesn't entail the capacity to answer *whether P*, for example), then his theory predicts this. It turns out that the proponents of KO, who want Rylean knowledge-how to look more like *knowledge*, miss Ryle's point: there's a kind of intelligence that can't be explained in terms of knowledge, or cognitive–epistemic achievement.

I've promised, too, to say why this matters to the contemporary debate about know-how. The reason is that contemporary, self-described Rylean views of know-how aim to meet KO by intellectualizing without *over*-intellectualizing know-how (see esp. Löwenstein 2017, 2021; Elzinga 2021; Worthmann 2021; cf. Habgood-Coote 2019). If my argument is sound, they shouldn't. Any view of know-how that takes after Ryle's is first and foremost concerned with describing a kind of intelligence. Developing an account of this kind of intelligence is important in its own right because it matters to how we understand our own agency, or how we manage to do what we know how to do (see Small 2017 and Hornsby 2011). Trying to *intellectualize* this intelligence (a capacity, ability, or disposition) to meet KO's demands runs the risk of reproducing the intellectualist's mistake, which was to assume that all intelligence is knowledge-like.²⁶

Moreover, I've shown that understanding Ryle should make us reconsider how we think of intelligence. If Ryle is right, intelligence is explanatorily basic—it's not in virtue of anything *else* that my performing such-and-such action is intelligent. I have some knowledge, and I implement it. If we think knowledge somehow explains (is required for, or grounds, what have you) intelligence, that's a view we'd have to argue for. And, to argue for it, we'd have to take Ryle's chess players seriously.

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²⁶ In fact, elsewhere I argue that it does reproduce the intellectualist's mistake.

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