Skill & Virtue
after ‘Know-How’

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Preface

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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And, finally, to Zed Adams, who gave me John Haugeland’s *Having Thought* and spurred my thinking about skill and virtue. Thank you. I am still trying to understand both. This thesis is in part a product of that effort.
Skill & Virtue after ‘Know-How’

Matthew Ryan Dougherty

Abstract:

This dissertation is an investigation of the prospects for thinking of ethical virtue as a kind of skill in light of the discussions of ‘knowledge-how’ that begin with Gilbert Ryle. Chapter 1 offers an account of Ryle’s interest in the notion of knowledge-how as partially underpinned by the hope that ethical virtue might be well-understood as a kind of skill. The chapter concludes, however, by noting that he eventually gives up on this idea, coming to believe that virtue requires a certain kind of care which skill does not. The remaining chapters can then be seen as an attempt to take up Ryle’s project of understanding virtue as a kind of skill by engaging with recent work on know-how, on the skill analogy in virtue ethics, and on care and commitment. Chapter 2 concerns what knowledge-how is knowledge of. It argues that knowledge-how is well-understood as knowledge of the standards, norms, or rules of an activity. This view is defended against arguments from recent ‘anti-intellectualists’ and ‘intellectualists’. Chapter 3 then argues that understanding knowledge-how as rule-knowledge is helpful for seeing that there are different senses of “knowledge-how”, some of which amount to skill and some of which do not. It also attempts to turn the debate about know-how back toward what Ryle understood as ‘Intellectualism’ – viz., the view that human intelligence essentially amounts to thinking, rather than the view that ‘know-how’ can be ascribed with a “that”-clause. Chapter 4 then turns to the skill analogy and the history of objections to the idea that virtue is a skill. This chapter argues for a reinterpretation of the skill analogy. It argues that the analogy is properly understood not as comparing virtuous individuals to individuals with mere practical skill (as is standardly thought) but, rather, as comparing virtuous individuals to good occupants of skill-involving roles – individuals distinguished, amongst other things, by their commitment to a craft that is in part definitive of their identity. In general outline, such an interpretation agrees with Ryle’s contention that virtue requires not only practical know-how but also care. Chapter 5, however, returns to the point at which Ryle had given up on virtue being a skill and asks whether the kind of care or commitment needed for the skill analogy might itself be a distinctive kind of skill. The aim in this chapter is to make plausible that such commitment is a skill and, hence, to make plausible that virtue might be thought of as consisting of a suite of skills.
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Introduction

0.1 Virtue

The past half-century of philosophical research has seen a renewed interest in the approach to ethics known as ‘virtue ethics’. If Julia Annas is correct, this renewed interest marks a return to the historical norm; she suggests that Western philosophy sees the first genuine alternatives to virtue ethics only in Kant’s deontology (b. 1724) and Bentham and Mill’s consequentialisms (b. 1748 and 1806, respectively).¹ Indeed, if Martha Nussbaum is correct that Kant, Bentham, and Mill themselves each make room for virtue, and that the notion only becomes foreign to later 19th and 20th century philosophers who appropriate their theories, then the virtue ethical norm has been almost completely historically dominant.² For us, however, it is not nearly dominant. Historians of philosophy have consistently taken an interest in the idea of virtue, but it is only recently again a topic of mainstream, contemporary ethical theorising.³

What is virtue? To have been so dominant in the history of ethics, it must be something quite general and formal – general and formal enough that individuals with otherwise divergent

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¹ Annas (2007, 515)
² Nussbaum (1999)
³ And this seems to be the case not just within the world of academic philosophy. My doctor recently expressed to me that virtue has become a hot topic in the medical world, though he lamented that ‘for most medics, there’s still only deontology and consequentialism.’
views of the ethical might be able to agree on it as a concept worth discussion in ethics. The Greek ἀρετή (aretē), from which the Romans get their *virtus*, generally means *goodness* or *excellence*. This is why we can speak of the ‘virtues’ of this or that hammer, or of this or that novel, or of this or that plan of action. Any number of things can be good or excellent, or have good or excellent qualities that contribute to their overall goodness.

The area of ethical thinking known as virtue ethics is specifically concerned with human goodness. It is concerned with what makes for excellent human beings. Commonly discussed virtues in ancient Chinese philosophy, for example, are practical wisdom, filiality, and dedication to and respect for ritual. In ancient Greek philosophy, courage, justice, temperance, magnanimity, and prudence are some of the virtues emphasized – to which the Catholic Church adds faith, hope, and charity. And more recent writers emphasize less traditional virtues – playfulness, solitude, and the ability to mourn, to name a few. Clearly there are numerous possible answers to the question of what makes for human excellence, which explains how such divergent ethical views could be subsumed under the heading “virtue ethics”.

If virtue is such a general notion, and if so many different views can be subsumed under it, why is it of particular interest? Is there anything distinctive about virtue ethical thinking? Two prominent answers to this question have precisely to do with virtue’s generality. Consider deontology and consequentialism again. At least as often understood, these theories are primarily concerned with determining which actions are right and which are wrong and, hence, predominantly with ‘moments of choice’. Kant’s deontology holds that one ought to act in such a way that one could will the maxim of one’s action to become a universal law for all human beings. And, similarly, consequentialism holds that one ought to act in such a way that will result in the best consequences – with different forms of consequentialism then holding different kinds of consequence as the kind that matters. Each of deontology and consequentialism, then, at least as often understood, are concerned solely with correct choice and with right action.

A first virtue ethical critique of such views is that while choice and action certainly are a crucial *part* of what makes for an excellent human being, they are only part. There is much

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4 For an interesting discussion of some changes in these notions – such as the Roman emphasis on virtue as manliness (the Latin *vir* means ‘man’) – see Geuss’s (2005) ‘Virtue and the Good Life’.

5 Yao (2012)

6 The first two are espoused as virtues by Nietzsche, according to Solomon (2004). The third is espoused by Lear (2017).
more to being human than taking action, so there is much more to being an excellent human than choosing and taking the right ones. Insofar as humans are well-understood as things that not only make choices and take action but, more generally, have a life, then being an excellent human will consist not only of choosing and acting well but of living well in general.\textsuperscript{7} Virtue, that is, concerns the whole human agent – their projects\textsuperscript{8}, their ways of seeing the world\textsuperscript{9}, their emotions\textsuperscript{10} and motives – and it concerns these not just in any one moment, or even series of moments, but across a whole life.\textsuperscript{11} Virtue ethical thinking thus does justice to the intuitive importance of our lives beyond moments of choice and action. And, indeed, though “ethics” has come often to have a more narrow meaning, its more general meaning makes sense of this generality. The Greek \textit{ēthos} from which our term comes – and which we still have in English in a related form – refers to a thing’s general ‘nature’ or ‘disposition’. Ethical virtue, then, is excellence of a person’s general nature or dispositions. It is excellence of character.

A second virtue ethical critique is closely related. Though deontology and consequentialist theories are themselves potentially general as concerns the domain of action they concern, philosophers have tended to talk of them only regarding our interactions with other humans – or, in the case of certain forms of consequentialism, our interactions with beings capable of pain and pleasure generally.\textsuperscript{12} The virtue ethical critique is, again, that human excellence, or a good human life, consists of more than this. For, first, a human life consists of more than mere ‘interactions’ and, second, it consists of more than interactions merely with sapient and sentient creatures. On the first point, rather than interaction, much of the human way of living is better characterized by its \textit{relationships}. We have family members, friends, partners, colleagues, and fellow citizens, for instance. Our interactions with these people come \textit{under} the heading of our relationships with them, which relationships are themselves characterized by the fact that they matter (or do not matter) to us. Turning to the second part of the critique, a human life also consists of, if not ‘relationships’ with non-sentient entities, then at least \textit{meaningful} interactions. We are (and aspire to be) members of \textit{disciplines}, of \textit{religions},

\begin{itemize}
\item This rejection of the ‘choice and action’ paradigm is a main theme in the Platonic virtue ethics of Iris Murdoch (e.g., (1970)).
\item e.g., Williams (1973)
\item See, e.g., various of the essay in McDowell (1998).
\item e.g., Nussbaum (2001)
\item Aristotle famously gives as his reason for this view that ‘one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day’ (NE 1098a18). (Note that this will be my way of citing Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} throughout the thesis. All translations of Aristotle in this thesis, unless otherwise noted, are from the (2014) Cambridge University Press edition of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, edited by Roger Crisp.)
\item e.g., Singer (1995)
\end{itemize}
and of professions, for instance. These things, too, can and often properly do matter very deeply to us. And as members of such institutions, we interact not only with humans and sentient creatures, but with things like microscopes and microscopic organisms, ceremonial icons, and spreadsheets. And, further, how we interact with these other things – how we go about our business generally as members of these institutions – reflects on our character as well. In taking these points seriously, virtue ethical theorising attempts to be concerned with the excellence of a human being and their life in general, rather than with just a few parts.

We may, nonetheless, desire a more specific answer to the question of what kind of thing virtue is. In thinking of virtue as concerning not only choice and action, but emotion and motivation, projects and ways of seeing the world – where these themselves concern not only other humans and non-human animals but also special relationships, other institutions, and artefacts – we see its generality. But we may still desire a further, more general characterisation of the virtuous person. The virtuous person is of course ‘excellent’ simply qua human being. But we may still desire to know what such excellence amounts to. What does the virtuous person possess that the non-virtuous person does not? The present thesis is an investigation of one of the ancient Greeks’ preferred answers to this question – viz., that the virtuous human being possesses a kind of skill and, hence, that virtue is itself a kind of skill.

In the next section, I will be describing why such a view is prima facie plausible. And in the final section, I will be laying out the approach to evaluating this view that I will be taking in the course of this thesis.

0.2 Skill and Virtue

It is a commonly discussed thought that what the virtuous person possesses is a distinctive kind of knowledge. This seems to have been Plato’s lifelong view of virtue (despite internal shifts along the way), as well as being a view which Aristotle opposes in claiming that while virtue requires knowledge, it requires more beside. At least in the early Platonic dialogues, however, the proposal often being tested is that virtue is a kind of skill or, in classical Greek, a technē (τέχνη).\(^{13}\) This is a view to which Aristotle gives considerable attention as well, especially

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\(^{13}\) For an extended engagement with Plato’s discussions, see Roochnik (1990). What one finds there is that in ancient Greece, technē is often used interchangeably with epistēmē. This interchangeability is in fact consistent with the history of our English term “skill”, which comes from the Old Norse term for ‘knowledge’. (See Chapter 5, n. 31 for a similar point made by Heidegger in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’.) To confuse things further, however, technē can also be translated as “art” (such as in “The Art of Wrestling”) or as “craft”. The latter meaning will be more relevant in Chapter 4, but, for simplicity, I understand technē as ‘skill’ throughout.
in his best-known ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As with knowledge, it is generally understood that while the early Plato holds that virtue is a skill, Aristotle holds a weaker view, that virtue is at most like skill. Many of the later Greek and Roman Stoics then take up the stronger view, explicitly understanding virtue as the ‘skill concerning living’ (τέχνη περί τόν Βίον).\(^{14}\)

In the present thesis, I will be re-interpreting but defending this stronger view.

Why might the view that virtue is a skill be at least *prima facie* attractive? Here I rely on four points with which even Aristotle agrees. The first is that both skill and virtue plausibly consist at least partially of knowledge. The standard view of skill is that skill is a kind of knowledge. And while there is longstanding disagreement about the status of virtue on this front, skill and virtue at least have the following in common: both are well-understood as ‘getting something right’. The individual skilled at doing backflips ‘gets backflips right’, in that they reliably succeed in doing them; the individual skilled at playing tennis ‘gets tennis right’, in that they reliably play well; and the individual skilled at gardening ‘gets gardening right’, in that they reliably succeed in their gardening. And similarly, in the case of virtue, the virtuous human being gets living right; they reliably live well. Skill and virtue, then, are similar in this respect.

The second *prima facie* reason to think of virtue as a kind of skill is closely related. It is that skill and virtue each plausibly consists at least partially of a particular kind of knowledge. Each plausibly consists of specifically practical knowledge, rather than, for instance, what we might call ‘observational’ knowledge (such as, e.g., knowledge that a glass is on the table) or some other kind. To put the point in the broadest possible terms, both skill and virtue have to do with doing things. While skill has to do with doing things like backflips and tennis and gardening, for instance, virtue has to do with living. Both, then, consist at least partially of practical knowledge.

The final two reasons for the attractiveness of thinking of virtue as a kind of skill are then themselves closely related. The first is that acquiring skill and acquiring virtue both require practice or training. And the second is that both are teachable. The first point is made by Aristotle when he categorises both skills and virtues as things which ‘we acquire first by exercising them’.\(^{15}\) This is an initially puzzling claim, since it seems that if one can exercise something, then one must already have it. But what Aristotle means is that we acquire these things by doing (or trying to do) what it is we want to become skilled at – or, in the case of virtue, by

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\(^{14}\) This is the topic of, e.g., Sellars (2009).

\(^{15}\) (NE 1103a30)
performing the acts that a virtuous person would perform. How does one learn to do a backflip, for instance? Presumably by attempting backflips; and the same goes for learning how to play tennis and learning how to garden. One gets good at these things by practicing them. And we want to say the same of virtue. One becomes kind, for instance, by performing kind acts, and becomes honest by being honest on particular occasions. As we have seen above, virtue is a particular kind of disposition, and such training is plausibly (at least in part) how one builds up such a disposition.

Turning to the final reason, we also tend to think that one is greatly helped in learning a skill or virtue by a good instructor or role model. And when one is so-helped, we say that one has learned how to do the thing in question (whether backflip, play tennis, garden, or live well) from that person. Both skill and virtue, that is, can be taught. Like training and practice, of course, instruction can fail – one can be taught tennis for years and not become any good, and the same goes for virtue. And even when instruction is successful, the teacher will never be wholly responsible for the student becoming skilled or virtuous – something is also required of the student, for instance. But teaching clearly has a role to play in acquiring either and, thus, makes for a similarity.

Skill and virtue, then, both require practical knowledge, training or practice, and can be taught. As we will see later in the thesis, there are also numerous reasons that philosophers have given for denying that virtue is a skill, but these four reasons are widely agreed as establishing at least a useful analogy between skill and virtue – viz., that virtue is at least like skill, often called ‘the skill analogy’. I aim to investigate how good an analogy it is, and also whether it might be more than a mere analogy – whether virtue might be a kind of skill.

0.3 After Know-How

In the present thesis, I approach the question of whether virtue is a kind of skill by way of an adjacent notion and debate which gained philosophical prominence around the same time that philosophers were regaining interest in virtue – as we will see, not merely coincidentally. This other notion is that of ‘knowledge how to do something’, often expressed simply as ‘knowledge-how’ or ‘know-how’. I said above that the standard view of skill is that it is a kind of knowledge. More specifically, the standard view is that skill is know-how. The person skilled at doing backflips, for instance, knows how to do backflips; and the person skilled at gardening knows how to garden. More than this, their knowing how to do these things, on the standard view, is their being skilled at doing
them. The proposal that virtue is a kind of skill, then, could similarly be understood as the proposal that being virtuous is *knowing how to live*.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the genesis of philosophical interest in the notion of knowledge-how. I do so by looking in detail at two generally unrecognized motivations that Gilbert Ryle – the 20th century philosopher generally credited with beginning the debate about know-how – had for discussing that notion. There is a standard story of this interest of Ryle’s that focuses on his criticisms of the 17th century philosopher René Descartes. I will be arguing that Ryle had at least two further, and perhaps more basic, motivations. The first is of a metaphilosophical sort: he believed that the notion of knowledge-how was central to a proper conception of philosophy itself. In particular, he thought that it was central in light of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s arguments in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which Ryle thought threatened to show philosophy to be a meaningless activity. And the second motivation is precisely the main interest of the present thesis: he was impressed by the idea that virtue might be a kind of skill. In his early work on know-how, he sets out to argue for this view by arguing that virtue is a kind of knowledge-how. But in later work, he moves away from and begins to criticize it. In particular, he begins to argue that whereas virtue requires *caring* about acting well, skill does not; and he argues as well that such care is not itself any kind of knowledge. The discussion here will provide us not only with a framework for thinking about know-how but also for thinking about why virtue may or may not be a kind of skill. In the remainder of the thesis, I will set out to take up Ryle’s initial project.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I turn to some issues from the recent debate over know-how. Standardly, the key issue has been to determine whether or not knowledge-how is a species of propositional knowledge. (Propositional knowledge is, for instance, knowledge that gardening is done in such-and-such a way, or knowledge that living is done in such-and-such way.) Arguing that knowledge-how is a species of propositional knowledge (or ‘knowledge-that’, as Ryle called it) has been a primary way in which some philosophers have opposed Ryle’s view that know-how is skill. This argument standardly goes as follows:

1. If knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that, then knowledge how to do a thing does not entail the ability to do it.
2. If knowledge how to do a thing does not entail the ability to do it, knowledge how to do a thing is not skill at doing it.
3. Knowledge-how *is* a species of knowledge-that.
4. Therefore, knowledge how to do a thing is not the same as skill at doing it.

In the middle chapters of this thesis, I will be considering a slightly different line of thinking, partially at odds with Ryle’s but supportive of it in the respects that I will argue truly mattered for him. On this other line of thinking, knowledge how to do a thing sometimes amounts to skill at
doing it and sometimes does not. I begin to argue for this view in Chapter 2, by discussing what knowledge-how is knowledge of. Here, I argue for one of the views which Ryle himself espoused on this issue – viz., that knowledge-how is knowledge of the rules of an activity. And in Chapter 3, I discuss the relation between knowledge how to a do a thing and the ability to do it. Here, I argue that knowledge of the rules of an activity sometimes entails the ability to act in accordance with those rules and sometimes does not; hence, if knowledge-how is rule-knowledge, knowledge-how sometimes entails the requisite kind of ability. The argument here will further enable us to hold that knowledge how to do a thing sometimes is skill at doing it – and it will allow us to then turn back to the question of whether being virtuous can be understood as knowing how to live, as a kind of skill at living.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the skill analogy both in historical terms and in terms of the current debate. As concerns the former, I consider the history of objections to the idea that virtue is a kind of skill. And as concerns the latter, I discuss the most prominent recent defences of the analogy. I argue, however, that the analogy has largely been misunderstood, both by its opponents and by its proponents. And I argue that this requires a reinterpretation and re-evaluation of it. My contention will be that the skill analogy is best-understood not as comparing the virtuous human being to the merely practically skilled individual but, rather, as comparing the virtuous human being to the good occupant of a skill-involving role. I argue that the good occupant of a skill-involving role (as concerns at least some roles) is not only skilled but also non-instrumentally committed to their practice and its demands on them. And I argue that this enables us to overcome all of the major objections to the analogy.

When we turn to Chapter 5, then, we will have reached a view of the relation between skill and virtue that is not too dissimilar to Ryle’s own. Much as he had held that the main difference between skill and virtue is that the latter requires a certain kind of care, we will have reached a view on which being a virtuous human being (like being a good occupant of a skill-involving role) requires a certain kind of commitment, which mere skill does not. The differences between this ‘commitment’ and Ryle’s ‘care’, however, will be crucial. Whereas Ryle is willing to think of care in the same breath as mere enjoyment, the kind of commitment that I will be invoking in reinterpreting the skill analogy is what I refer to as ‘identity-defining commitment’. Such commitment is not only relatively deep; it also has a structure that makes it quite distinct from mere enjoyment – a structure, I will be arguing, that also makes it a candidate to be a distinctive kind of skill. In this final chapter, I argue that such commitment is a distinctive kind of skill and, hence, that while Ryle was correct to argue that virtue is no simple form of skill, it does consist of something like a suite of skills.
Chapter 1
Gilbert Ryle and the Ethical Impetus for ‘Know-How’

To elucidate the thoughts of a philosopher we need to find the answer not only to the question ‘What were his intellectual worries?’ but, before that question and after that question, the answer to the question ‘What was his overriding Worry?’

– Gilbert Ryle

1.0 Introduction

The paper ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’, Gilbert Ryle’s presidential address to the Aristotelian Society in 1945, marked the start of an ongoing discussion in academic philosophy on the nature of knowing how to do things and its relation to knowing truths or facts. If Ryle was right, his distinction was one which is ‘quite familiar to all of us’; but there is little doubt that he himself was largely responsible for bringing it to philosophical consciousness.

His primary aim in doing so is commonly understood to have been anti-Cartesian. In the presidential address, he describes himself as clarifying the nature of intelligence – or, in his more linguistic terms, as clarifying ‘the logical behaviour of the several concepts of intelligence’. He lists various such concepts, but his concept of choice is knowledge-how. He believes that once we are clear about what knowing how to do things consists in – for example,

1 Ryle (1971a, ix)
2 Ryle (1945a, 4)
3 (ibid., 1)
4 Others are shrewdly, wittily, methodically, and scrupulously. Presumably, Ryle believed that to do a thing shrewdly, wittily, methodically, or scrupulously was to do it knowingly, and that the basic case of doing a thing knowingly was exercising knowledge how to do it.
what knowing how to ride a bicycle or knowing how to care for a garden consists in — we will see that a person’s intelligence is ‘as directly exhibited in some of his doings as it is in some of his thinking’. Ryle’s most explicit aim, then, is to erase the temptation to think that intelligence is or amounts to thinking — the view he calls ‘Intellectualism’. And though Descartes is not mentioned here, the proposed view is plausibly anti-Cartesian. For erasing the temptation to believe that human intelligence essentially amounts to thinking also plausibly erases the Cartesian temptation to believe that human being essentially amounts to thinking.

That we now tend to think of Ryle’s aim in his presidential address as specifically anti-Cartesian, however, may result from the fact that The Concept of Mind (his most famous work, published four years later) is explicitly anti-Cartesian, and knowledge-how again takes centre stage there. In the introduction to the book, Ryle states his purpose as ‘exploding’ ‘the Cartesian myth’ of ‘the ghost in the machine’ — a view which, he says, understands human mind and agency as ‘para-mechanical’ (that is, as one part paranormal and one part mechanical). Add to this that the chapter entitled ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ is the first substantive chapter of the book (following the chapter entitled ‘Descartes’ Myth’, and repeating much of the material of his presidential address), and it becomes quite reasonable to assume not only that ‘knowledge-how’ is foundational for Ryle’s critique in The Concept of Mind but also that the impetus for discussing the concept was anti-Cartesian all along.

Such assumptions are certainly plausible and, to an extent, correct. But alone, I think they leave us with an impoverished picture of the genesis (and continuation) of Ryle’s interest in know-how. The concept of ‘know-how’ clearly does form part of the foundation of his anti-Cartesian critique in The Concept of Mind, and the initial motivation for discussing it may, at least in part, have been anti-Cartesian. But we have good reason to believe that much more motivates his discussions, even as concerns The Concept of Mind.

In ‘Ryle’s “Intellectualist Legend” in Historical Context’ (2017), Michael Kremer has provided us with an additional aspect of this picture. He has shown that in taking ‘Intellectualism’ as his enemy, Ryle plausibly saw himself as contributing to a decades-long debate about the nature of human mind and agency, ‘spanning not only philosophy, but also psychology, economics, political science, and sociology.’ Put in the most general terms, this debate pitted Reason against Instinct, with individuals who took Reason’s side being labelled

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5 (ibid., 5)
6 Ryle (1949, 7ff.)
7 Kremer (2017, 17-18); I rely on him for the historical content of this and the following paragraph.
‘intellectualists’, and those who took Instinct’s being labelled ‘anti-intellectualists’. While intellectualists understood human beings as basically rational and as at their best when acting with deliberation and thought, the latter understood human beings, much like non-human animals, as basically instinctual and as at their best when acting instinctually.

As Kremer tells the story, the so-called ‘revolt against reason’ in philosophy was led by French intuitionist Henri Bergson. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bergson had become a public intellectual and cult figure and, in 1928, even received a Nobel Prize in literature. But this was no doubt a controversial choice. In 1915, the sociologist L.T. Hobhouse had said of Bergson’s philosophy that it was fitting for ‘a generation which was rushing headlong on disaster’, since it degraded reason and placed instinct ‘upon the throne’ (Hobhouse 1915, 51). In 1918, the American philosopher Ralph Barton Perry seconded Hobhouse, calling Bergson’s philosophy a form of ‘irrationalism’, supported by ‘the motivation of lawlessness’ (Perry 1918, 296). And even into the Second World War, the assault on Bergson and anti-intellectualism continued, with then-political scientist Max Lerner going as far as to say that Bergson and other anti-intellectualists had prepared the ground for Hitler, albeit unconsciously (Lerner 1943). Bergson was thus seen as the arch anti-intellectualist.

Today, the term “anti-intellectualism” is commonly used to describe Ryle’s position as well, but as Kremer argues, Ryle’s aim in opposing ‘the Intellectualist legend’ is not to defend anti-intellectualism as described above but, rather, to mark a path between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. In both the presidential address and The Concept of Mind, Ryle argues that human action can be rational (or reasonable) without involving reasoning – being, in a sense, both rational and instinctual. In particular, Ryle marks a path between Reason and Instinct by arguing that exercises of knowledge-how involve both. Kremer’s history of the Intellectualism debate brings this fact more firmly to light and thus adds some needed historical richness to the story of Ryle’s interest in ‘know-how’.

I believe, however, that neither the anti-Cartesian story nor Kremer’s history of the Intellectualism debate, even together, gives us a suitably complete story of Ryle’s interest in know-how. Indeed, I think that perhaps the most basic impetus for Ryle’s interest lay elsewhere. Arguably, his most basic interest in know-how is (broadly speaking) an ethical one,

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8 With some help from the American pragmatist William James. See, e.g., A Pluralistic Universe (1908).
9 Technically, Bergson won the 1927 Nobel Prize for literature, but he was not awarded it until 1928. In 1927, the committee had decided that there were no suitable candidates. They thus saved the award until the following year and awarded it then, along with the 1928 prize, which was won by the Norwegian novelist Sigrid Undset. (Bergson, however, had been nominated numerous times prior.)
with both a theoretical and a practical dimension. In the epigraph to this chapter, we see Ryle state that to understand a philosopher, we need to know not only their ‘intellectual worries’ – their theoretical aims and interests – but also their ‘overriding Worry’ – their more basic, even existential motivations. In arguing that Ryle’s interest in know-how was an ethical one, I will be arguing that his own worries consisted in part of an ethical ‘intellectual worry’ and in part of an ethical ‘Worry’.

First, Ryle was intellectually worried about the ancient question of whether ethical virtue is a kind of knowledge. We see him interacting with this question in the presidential address itself, but also in an earlier published discussion of know-how, occurring five years prior to the presidential address and having specifically moral knowledge as its topic – viz., ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’ (1940). In both this earlier paper and the presidential address, we see him concerned to argue that genuine moral knowledge (or ethical virtue) is a kind of knowledge-how, or skill. This ethical interest is thus an important part of the genesis of his interest in know-how. As we will see, he continues to engage with it in various forms up to the end of his career.

And, second, Ryle regularly entertained a Worry about the status of philosophy itself. Having begun his philosophical career just after the fall of ‘psychologism’ and at the start of ‘analytic’ philosophy, he was worried that the discipline had no real job to do and, hence, that life as a philosopher – a life that he was living – was a senseless one. This is an ethical worry in a broad sense, having to do with the goodness or meaningfulness of a life. In regard to this worry, too, Ryle saw know-how as the answer. He thought that the philosopher’s characteristic kind of knowledge was knowledge-how, rather than knowledge-that. In elaborating on these points in what follows, I begin as Ryle recommends, by discussing his ‘overriding Worry’, before turning to his ‘intellectual worry’. The resulting picture of Ryle’s interest in know-how, I hope, will serve as a supplement to the anti-Cartesian story and Kremer’s history of ‘Intellectualism’.

10 Iris Murdoch perhaps similarly notes in The Sovereignty of Good that ‘[i]t is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher: what is he afraid of?’ (Murdoch 1970, 72).
11 Ryle uses the terms “ethical” and “moral” interchangeably, such that talking of “ethical virtue” (if ethical virtue is a kind of knowledge) and talking of “moral knowledge” are two ways of talking of the same thing. I depart from this usage, both in my talking of Ryle’s Worry as an ethical one and more generally in later chapters. I use “ethical” as concerned with how to live generally and “moral” as concerned with how to live with other people. In discussing Ryle’s views, however, I follow Ryle’s usage.
12 Kremer (2017) briefly discusses this topic in the final few paragraphs of his paper, but his discussion deserves expansion as well as some clarification.
1.1 A Philosophical Crisis

It is widely appreciated that Ryle shared various philosophical dispositions with Ludwig Wittgenstein. Both are seen, for instance, as having anti-Cartesian and pseudo-behaviouristic philosophical views and as preferring linguistic and therapeutic philosophical methods. But comparisons along these lines tend to be made between Ryle and the so-called ‘later Wittgenstein’, especially of the 1953 *Philosophical Investigations*. Much less widely appreciated is the influence of the ‘early Wittgenstein’ on Ryle. It was Wittgenstein’s 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that first captivated Ryle and that set the tone and task for his philosophical career. And this is because it was the *Tractatus*, according to Ryle, that threw philosophy in England in the first half of the 20th century into crisis.13

As Ryle tells this story, philosophers at the turn of the century were moving beyond a ‘psychologistic’ view of philosophy.14 He says that from Locke through Bradley, philosophers had tacitly understood their activity as a psychological one and had debated their issues as if they were psychological issues – as if the philosopher’s job was to describe how the mind works. But by the late 19th century, psychology had started being practiced in labs and clinics, and this made philosophy’s armchair psychology suspect. As a result, philosophers were being forced to re-conceive of what they were doing and to understand their job in other terms.

Ryle reports that for a time, philosophers took shelter in Platonic idioms. They thought of themselves as concerned not with the workings of the mind but with the domain of ‘abstract’ or ‘conceptual’ entities, entities like possibilities, essences, timelessly subsisting universals, numbers, truths, falsities, values and meanings. Doing so had the double benefit of enabling philosophy to keep its status as a science (viz., the science of abstract entities) as well as of enabling it to keep its status as an autonomous science, independent from (or else foundational to) other sciences.

In the period at the start of the century, Ryle says that philosophers ‘tried not to mind the dream-like character of the[[r] new asylum.”15 But Bertrand Russell, in his attempts to ground mathematics in logic, ran into a paradox which would lead to their disenchantment:

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13 Ryle sometimes gives equal weight in this story to the Logical Positivists (see, e.g., Ryle 1970, 9-10), but (seemingly because Ryle saw Wittgenstein’s work as also momentous for helping resolve the crisis) his focus tends to be on Wittgenstein.
14 Ryle (1951, 250ff)
15 (ibid.)
Russell, in his inquiries into the logical principles underlying mathematics, found that he could not well help constructing statements which had the logically disturbing property that they were true only on condition that they were false, and false only on condition that they were true. (Ryle 1951, 252)

Ryle comments that Russell found a way of resolving this paradox, but he holds that it was Wittgenstein who drew the solution’s crisis-inducing conclusions for logic and philosophy — and, in doing so, set the task for Ryle’s own generation of philosophers.

Put one way, both Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s solution was to distinguish, on the one hand, between truth and falsehood and, on the other, between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. The statements Russell had found (that were true only on condition that they were false, and false only on condition that they were true) were deemed to be neither true nor false but meaningless — they were ‘nonsensical simulacra of statements’. In offering this solution, however, Russell thought of nonsense as relative to a language; a statement that was nonsensical in one language needn’t be nonsensical in all languages. Wittgenstein agreed but thought that there must be at least one language that non-relatively makes sense; and he thought that whatever is nonsense in that language is nonsense full stop.

The implication Wittgenstein drew in the *Tractatus* was that logic and philosophy are, at base, concerned not with substantive truth and falsehood, but with sense and non-sense. The philosopher, then, does not study abstract entities but, rather, determines what can or cannot be significantly said. The further, crisis-inducing implication was just a step behind:

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein came to the frustrating conclusion that…[t]o try to tell what makes the difference between significant and nonsensical talk is itself to cross the divide between significant and nonsensical talk. Philosophizing [as well as logic] can, indeed, open our eyes to [principles of sense and nonsense], but it cannot issue in significant statements of them. Philosophy is not a science; it cannot yield theories or doctrines. (Ryle 1951, 253)

According to the early Wittgenstein, the conception of philosophy which he had reached had the implication that to do philosophy is to cross the bounds of sense, making philosophical practice itself a kind of nonsense. As he saw it, this meant that all of philosophy’s problems and statements are mere pseudo-problems and pseudo-statements, formed of the non-sensical

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16 Ryle presumably refers here only to Russell’s semantic paradoxes, rather than the logical ones, including the so-called ‘Russell’s paradox’.

17 (ibid.)

18 We see evidence that this was Russell’s view at least at the time of the *Tractatus* in the introduction he wrote for that book, as a favour to Wittgenstein. Potter (2002) discusses these issues, and the differences between Wittgenstein and Russell in more detail. See also Landini (2004) for a detailed look at Russell’s varying approaches to these paradoxes.
and, hence, strictly speaking, of the unsayable. He could thus think of himself as having ‘solved’ all of its problems.19

As Ryle and others saw it, however, the Tractatus rather set them an urgent, existential task:

We were [then] facing what was in effect the…challenge of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus… We philosophers were in for a near-lifetime of enquiry into our own title to be enquirers. Had we any answerable questions, including this one? (Ryle 1970, 10)

As Ryle expresses this in the ‘Introduction’ to his Collected Papers, the problem was that philosophy had considered itself a science, concerned with discovering truths, theories, and doctrines. But the Tractatus had raised some troubling questions: ‘What sort of an enquiry is philosophy as distinct from Natural Science, Mental Science, Mathematics, Theology and Formal Logic? What, if any, is its proprietary subject-matter? What, if any, is its peculiar method?’ (Ryle 1971a, ix). These questions occupied Ryle from the point of the Tractatus onward, not merely as theoretical questions but as very practical ones, concerning how he and other philosophers were to understand themselves, as well as whether they could understand themselves as doing anything that made sense.

By 1937, Ryle had come upon an answer to these questions that suitably satisfied him, though he continued to work out its details for the remainder of his career. It was an answer that would lead him, within a few years, to the notion of ‘know-how’. In his ‘Taking Sides in Philosophy’, Ryle gives both a negative and a positive construal of philosophy. On the negative side, he agrees with the view of the Tractatus that philosophy is not in the business of yielding theories or doctrines. Here he puts this as the point that philosophy is not about ‘taking sides’, not about settling upon Idealism or Realism, Rationalism or Empiricism, Monism or Pluralism. Indeed, he argues that philosophy has no place for “isms” at all, save for in student examinations and as short-cuts in philosophical discussion. But on the positive side, Ryle nonetheless understands philosophy as a form of ‘discovery’:

The real root of my objection [to taking sides in philosophy] is, I think, the view that I take of the nature of philosophical inquiry. I am not going to expound it in full, but a part of the view is that it is a species of discovery. And it seems absurd for discoverers to split into Whigs and Tories. (1937, 320)

Discoverers do not split into Whigs and Tories, the thought seems to be, because doing so requires having settled opinions or theories, and to settle upon a theory is, to that extent, to

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19 See Wittgenstein’s Preface to the work.
have ceased actively being a discoverer. Factions only make sense when one is no longer in the process of discovering; so factions in philosophy indicate that, properly speaking, it is not philosophy which is being done.

It’s unclear whether this view of Ryle’s is ultimately tenable. But what matters for our purposes are the details of his positive conception of philosophy as a form of discovery. Essential to this conception are not the theories in which philosophy results but, rather, its method. Philosophy, Ryle says, is its method, and its method is ‘dialectic’ or ‘argument’:

Philosophers do not make known matters of fact which were unknown before. The sense in which they throw light is that they make clear what was unclear before, or make obvious things which were previously in a muddle. And the dawning of this desired obviousness occurs in the finding of a logically rigorous philosophical argument. Something that was obscure becomes obvious to me in the act of seeing the force of a particular philosophical argument. Nor can I make a short cut to that clarification by perusing the conclusions, but skipping the reasoning of the argument. (1937, 329-330)

Once again, the fingerprints of the Tractatus are clear. Ryle agrees with Wittgenstein that philosophy is not in the business of propounding theories or doctrines, and he agrees that it is in the business of clarifying (or ‘throwing light on’) what was unclear before. But whereas the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus thus concludes that philosophy is nonsensical, Ryle disagrees. For Ryle, philosophers needn’t throw away any ladder but, rather, have as their task to engage ongoingly in a method of dialectic or argument. As Ryle expresses later, marking his reason for departing from the Tractatus on this point, ‘Wittgenstein [in the Tractatus] had himself said very effective things, and talking effectively is not talking nonsensically’ (1951, 253). Thus, though Ryle takes it as true that philosophy does not properly yield theories, he still holds that

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20 One might reasonably wonder here whether Ryle is not himself taking philosophical sides (or, rather, meta-philosophical sides). He says, for instance, in concluding the paper that one of the greatest discoveries that a philosopher can make is a discovery of a new method (1937, 332). This might seem to imply that dialectic is not the only method of philosophy. It would be more charitable, however, to understand Ryle as thinking that there are different methods of argument and dialectic, thus sub-methods of philosophy. This would especially seem the properly charitable view to take in light of Ryle’s close acquaintance with the method of phenomenology. (See, e.g., his review of Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit (1928), his ‘Phenomenology’ (1932), his review of Farber’s The Foundations of Phenomenology (1946) and his later Phenomenology Versus “The Concept of Mind” (1962).) He clearly thought of phenomenology as a form of philosophy, so we should assume that he would have been willing to think of phenomenology as consisting of a form of argument or dialectic. Though this would still, in a sense, be taking sides.

21 The most famous lines of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus are the first and the penultimate. The line referred to here is the penultimate, in which Wittgenstein expresses that philosophical statements clarify but are themselves nonsense:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. (Wittgenstein 1921, 6.54)
“it can be skilful or unskilful, successful or unsuccessful”. It is not nonsense but, rather, consists of method, done well or done poorly. For Ryle, this was the answer to the philosophical crisis. But he continues to be concerned with it well after 1937.

Ryle’s work on ‘know-how’ constitutes a significant and crucial part of this continued concern. If philosophy really is to be a method and not a body of doctrines or truths, there must really be a distinction between method and truth. And if the philosopher is to be characterised as a discoverer and knower of method, rather than a discoverer and knower of truths, there must really be a distinction between knowing a method and knowing a truth. And these are precisely the terms in which he introduces us to the distinction between ‘knowing-how’ and ‘knowing-that’, with the aim of showing that they are distinct and mutually irreducible concepts:

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. (Ryle 1945a, 3)

And later he notes again:

The advance of knowledge does not consist only in the accumulation of discovered truths, but also and chiefly in the cumulative mastery of methods. (ibid., 15)

Though these claims are not explicitly meta-philosophical, when read against the backdrop of his meta-philosophical position of 1937, it becomes plausible that he saw this non-reducibility as crucial for philosophy. It suggests that he saw his task in securing the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that as in part securing the status of philosophy itself.

This point is further supported by a paper that Ryle seems to have been composing at the very same time as the presidential address – both, apparently, rather hastily. A week prior to delivering ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ as his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society, Ryle also gave his inaugural lecture as Waynflete Professor at Oxford, ‘Philosophical Arguments’ (1945b). This lecture is through-and-through meta-philosophical, and it is so in at least two ways relevant to the presidential address. First, Ryle’s explicit aim in the inaugural lecture is to exhibit the logical structure of a key method of philosophy – viz., reductio ad absurdum arguments. This is interesting in relation to the presidential address because reductio

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22 (ibid.)

23 It is worth noting that Ryle understands Wittgenstein as having come around to this view himself and as exhibiting it masterfully in the *Philosophical Investigations*. See, e.g., Ryle (1951, 255).

24 Ryle had been released from his military duties just a month or so prior. I rely on Kremer (2017, 36) here.
ad absurdum is precisely the form of argument on which Ryle relies heavily there. His primary way of arguing that knowledge-how is not reducible to knowledge-that is to show that assuming otherwise results in vicious regresses – a kind of absurdity. It is thus plausible that he saw the two papers as closely connected.

And, second, Ryle also makes very clear that the reason he is concerned to exhibit the logical structure of reductio ad absurdum arguments is that he is concerned, once again, with the status of philosophy itself. In introducing his topic in ‘Philosophical Arguments’, he expresses this worry about the status of philosophy much as we have seen it above:

Philosophers have in recent years given much consideration to the nature, objectives and methods of their own inquiry. This interest has been due partly to a certain professional hypochondria, since the conspicuous progress made by other studies has induced in philosophers some nervousness about the scale of their own successes. Partly, also...[t]he exposition of the logical credentials of different sorts of scientific conclusions has posed in a bright if painful light the corresponding questions about the foundations of philosophical doctrines. (Ryle 1945b, 196)

It is directly following this passage that Ryle states his aim of exhibiting the logical structure of reductio ad absurdum arguments, making clear that his underlying aim in doing so is to legitimate philosophy. And he again emphasizes here that philosophy is not in the business of yielding doctrines or truths but of method – he compares the practice of philosophy to the practice of an engineer who discovers the strength of various materials. The philosopher, he says, similarly tests the strength of philosophical propositions and arguments. At the time of writing and delivering ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’, then, Ryle is clearly still concerned with the foundations of philosophy. In particular, he is concerned to secure its methods; so it would be surprising if he did not see the similar (though more basic) importance of showing that knowing such methods is irreducible to knowing truths.

Finally, it is worth noting that in hindsight, Ryle paints a similarly meta-philosophical picture of The Concept of Mind itself. In his ‘Autobiography’, Ryle reports that having taken up the Waynflete Professorship in 1945, he thought that he ought to

apply, and be seen to be applying to some large-scale philosophical crux the answer to the question that had preoccupied us in the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s, the question namely “What constitutes a philosophical problem; and what is the way to solve it?” (Ryle 1970, 12)

As we have seen, his answer to the latter question is “argument and dialectic” and, perhaps primarily “reductio ad absurdum arguments”. As he saw it, ‘what was needed now was an
example of the method really working, in breadth and depth and where it was really needed’. In fact, Ryle initially took as his ‘large-scale philosophical crux’ the problem of the freedom of the will; but he later settled upon ‘the concept of mind’. He thus describes *The Concept of Mind* as ‘a philosophical book’ with ‘a meta-philosophical purpose’. In light of this, it would seem that his anti-Cartesianism is better-seen as the vehicle of his project than its fundamental end. The fundamental end was showing that philosophy had a job to do and could do it. This was Ryle’s *Worry* – a practical ethical impetus for his interest in know-how.

1.2 Know-How and Virtue

We now turn to the more theoretical ethical impetus for Ryle’s interest in know-how, his intellectual worry. In this respect, the influence of ancient Greek moral philosophy on Ryle, like the influence of the early Wittgenstein, is not widely appreciated. On reading the presidential address of 1945, one is thus likely to take the numerous references to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as mere asides. He casually begins the paper by mentioning that the Intellectualist legend ‘perhaps’ derives from Plato’s account of the tripartite soul; later mentions that Aristotle’s solution to Socrates’ puzzle of akrasia fails because it assumes a form of Intellectualism; claims, in passing, that ‘know-how’ also resolves Socrates’ puzzle about why human excellence cannot be imparted; and, finally, states that Aristotle’s “έθισμος” (*ethismos*) is better understood in terms of ‘know-how’ than in terms of the usual translation, “habituation”. In fact, each but the third of these points is made in an actual parenthetical aside. But it is little accident that Ryle would have been engaging with the Greeks here, and also little accident that he would have been thinking of ‘know-how’ as having direct ties to virtue.

A first reason is that Ryle was steeped in ancient Greek philosophy. Not only did he study Greats (i.e., Classics) as an undergraduate at Oxford and, subsequently, teach Greek philosophy ‘in some detail’ to Oxford undergraduates; he also published numerous exegetical

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26 (ibid.); Ryle’s famous “category mistake” arguments (used liberally in *The Concept of Mind*) are also forms of reductio ad absurdum.
27 (ibid.)
28 Ryle (1970, 1-3); indeed, that was the only way to study philosophy in Oxford at the time.
29 (ibid., 11)
(and often quite technical) reviews, articles, and even a book on the topic. \(^{30}\) Reactions to Ryle’s work in ancient philosophy are mixed, but he clearly studied the Greeks closely. \(^{31}\)

That he did would help to explain why Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle came readily to mind when he was writing ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’. The presidential address was presented just a month or so after Ryle had been demobilized from four years serving in military intelligence – likely meaning that the paper (along with his inaugural lecture as the Waynflete Professor) would have been written in a rather short period of time. \(^{32}\) If this is so, it would make sense for Ryle to have leant on material that he knew well.

That Ryle took a general interest in ancient Greek philosophy, however, does not explain why specifically ethical topics came to mind. Why did they? A large part of the answer is that prior to his military service, Ryle had already written a paper making use of a distinction much like that between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, and that paper had an explicitly ethical aim. In 1940, he had published ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’, which made central use of a distinction between ‘operative knowledge’ and ‘academic knowledge’. One of its main conclusions had been that genuine moral knowledge is operative rather than academic; and, as we will see, he very often talks of operative knowledge as ‘knowledge-how’. Ethical topics came to mind in writing ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’, then, because Ryle had already been writing and thinking of the distinction in ethical terms. And by the time of the presidential address, he had begun to explore it in terms of a favourite question of the ancients: ‘Is virtue a kind of knowledge?’. He clearly thought that the notion of know-how helped to

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\(^{30}\) Amongst them are ‘Plato’s Parmenides’ (1939a), ‘Review of F.M. Cornford Plato and Parmenides’ (1939b), ‘Letters and Syllables in Plato’ (1960), ‘The Timaeus Locrus’ (1965a), ‘The Academy and Dialectic’ (1965b), ‘Dialectic in the Academy’ (1965c), Plato’s Progress (1966), and ‘Plato’ (1967). This is not to mention the numerous other articles in which Ryle notes ancient Greek or Roman philosophers in passing, relating them to his immediate topic. His engagement with the history of philosophy seemed to have been spurred, at least in part, by an aversion to the kind of philosopher-worship that he sometimes witnessed in Cambridge at the height of Wittgenstein’s popularity. He notes that when visiting the Moral Sciences Club, the ‘veneration for Wittgenstein was so incontinent that mentions, for example my mentions, of other philosophers were greeted with jeers… This contempt for thoughts other than Wittgenstein’s seemed to me pedagogically disastrous for the students and unhealthy for Wittgenstein himself. It made me resolve, not indeed to be a philosophical polyglot, but to avoid being a monoglot; and most of all to avoid being one monoglot’s echo, even though he was a genius and a friend’ (Ryle 1970, 11).

\(^{31}\) Charles Kahn’s (1968) review of Plato’s Progress is informative here. Kahn reports that Ryle had already made important contributions to Plato scholarship but that Plato’s Progress is more interesting for what it tells us about Ryle’s view of philosophy than what it tells us about the life and philosophy of Plato. (In Plato’s Progress we once again see Ryle emphasizing a view like the one expressed in his ‘Taking Sides in Philosophy’ – ‘[P]hilosophy is not adherence to a tenet or membership of a church or party. It is exploration’ (Ryle 1966, 9). It is also interesting that Ryle here conjectures that Plato himself experienced a philosophical crisis around the time that Aristotle would have been a student, banning dialectic from the Academy as a result.)

\(^{32}\) See, again, Kremer (2017, 36).
answer it. As we will see, the asides of the presidential address form an argument for the same answer given in the earlier paper – an answer which Socrates had been drawn to but which Aristotle had denied: that virtue is a kind of know-how, or skill. At some point after the presidential address, Ryle himself gives up on this answer, but in the address itself he clearly sets out to resolve the ancients’ question affirmatively, by seeing virtue as a kind of skill. His interest in know-how thus has this more intellectual ethical impetus as well. In the following sections, I look first to Ryle’s early paper concerning know-how, before turning to ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’, and then to subsequent work on virtue and knowledge.

1.2.1 ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’ (1940)

In ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’, Ryle is primarily interested in what he thinks is a puzzling fact: that while one can have moral convictions about the behaviour of others, one cannot similarly have pangs of conscience on others’ behalves. One’s conscience says only, ‘I ought not to have done that,’ (for instance), not, ‘They ought not to have done that’. Convictions, on the other hand, can concern either. Ryle had always assumed that a pang of conscience was simply an expression of knowledge or conviction that some action-type or particular action is right or wrong, making pangs of conscience coextensive with felt convictions.33 But he now wishes to understand how conscience and moral conviction can come apart.

He does so by making and putting to use a distinction between ‘operative’ and ‘academic’ knowledge, defining each by the public test for its possession. He offers five such tests – two for the possession of academic knowledge, two for the possession of operative knowledge, and one for the possession of a state which he says is ‘between’ the other two.34 If an agent academically knows a moral principle, Ryle says, they will (1) utter the principle regularly, relevantly, and without hesitation and (2) similarly utter other things which presuppose the principle. An agent with such knowledge, he says, has a principle as part of their ‘intellectual furniture’. If, on the other hand, the agent is in a state between academic and operative knowledge, they will also (3) be ready or eager to persuade others of the principle and to dissuade them of acting inconsistently with it. An agent in this state, Ryle says, possesses ‘respect’ or ‘admiration’ for the principle.35 And, finally, if an agent operatively knows a moral

33 Ryle uses “knowledge” and “conviction” interchangeably, so I will do the same here.
34 Ryle (1940, 33)
35 Ryle does not specify whether this state includes academic knowledge.
principle, they will (4) behave in accordance with the principle regularly, relevantly, and without hesitation and (5) similarly feel guilty, resolve to reform, etc., when having failed to do so. In this case, Ryle says, the agent has the principle as part of their ‘real nature’.\(^3^6\)

Academic knowledge and operative knowledge, as Ryle describes them, are different ways of possessing rules or principles.\(^3^7\) Academic knowledge is possessing a rule less than one ought to, whereas operative knowledge is possessing it properly. Operative knowledge, that is, is proper knowledge of a rule. It is knowledge such that one is disposed to act in accordance with the rule. Ryle thus understands proper moral knowledge as operative knowledge, though he intends the same to be true of knowledge of rules of conduct generally:

To know properly the rules of grammar is to be able to talk correctly, to correct mistakes and to wince at those of others. A man’s party manners show whether he ‘knows’ the rules of etiquette; his ability to cite ‘Etiquette for Gentlemen’ does not. (Ryle 1940, 187)

And here, he also speaks in terms of “know-how” and “skill”:

In a certain sense, I, having read the text-books and been a spectator, know how to swim; that is, I know what actions people must take to progress in a desired direction in the water, with nostrils clear of the water. But no one would say that I really know how to swim or that I have swimming-skill, unless when I do it myself I usually succeed. (ibid., 188)\(^3^8\)

Just as the proper manifestation of know-how or skill is skilful performance, Ryle says, so the proper manifestation of conscience is good conduct. Conscience involves having convictions in an operative way, such that one is disposed to act in accordance with the principle about which one is convicted (and is reluctant to act badly, and feels remorse when one has done so, etc.). And just as it would be absurd to say that one has ‘skill or expertness in the swimming of others’ (ibid.), so it would be absurd to say that one has pangs of conscience about the behaviour of others. One may have pangs of conscience about how to respond to the behaviour of others, but not about their behaviour itself. Ryle thus concludes that whereas conviction

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\(^{3^6}\) It is unclear whether he intends operative knowledge to include academic knowledge. Sometimes it seems so; other times it seems not.

\(^{3^7}\) ‘I suggest that the solution of the puzzle, which, I think, is a genuine one about the syntax of ‘conscience’ and of ‘moral conviction’, is in this direction. What is it to have a moral conviction? Or, what is it to have principles?’ (Ryle 1940, 32). This suggests a difference between the distinction here and the distinction of ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’. In the later paper, Ryle distinguishes between the kinds of knowledge in terms not only of how what is known is known (viz., in terms of ability to say how to perform a given action vs. ability to perform the action) but also in terms of what is known (true propositions or facts vs. ways, methods, or rules). I return to this topic in Chapter 3.

\(^{3^8}\) Ryle is less concessive in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’. He does not say, for instance, that having read a textbook is sufficient for any kind of know-how.
may express either operative or academic knowledge, conscience expresses only operative knowledge. This is why conscience says only, ‘I ought not to have done that,’ and not, ‘They ought not to have done that’.

The interesting point for our purposes, however, is just Ryle’s claim that to know a moral rule properly or really is to know it operatively, rather than academically. For, again, Ryle claims that knowing operatively is knowing-how. And he is also happy to talk of ‘operatively knowing a moral rule’ as (for instance) ‘being honest’ – hence, in terms of virtue. These two points make for a smooth transition from talking primarily in terms of operative and moral knowledge in ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’ to talking in terms of knowledge-how and virtue in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’.

1.2.2 ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ (1945)

On the face of it (and, indeed, for the most part), Ryle’s presidential address concerns a very different issue to that of ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’. It concerns intelligence generally, by discussing intelligent behaviour generally. As we noted above, he begins the address by disparaging Plato’s tripartite account of the soul and its concomitant account of human action, claiming that it is a possible source of ‘the Intellectualist legend’ which Ryle himself aims to disprove. Here, I will discuss each of the asides relevant to his understanding virtue as a kind of knowledge-how.

The Intellectualist legend, as Ryle explains it, is to be understood as positing at least two faculties in explaining human action. The first is Intelligence, whose function is to ‘consider propositions’, or think. Intelligence on its own, however, as the legend understands it, cannot effect action. It is thus thought to require, as Ryle calls it, ‘a go-between faculty’ – a faculty that is incapable itself of considering propositions but that is capable of effecting action in accordance with propositions. This go-between faculty, he says, is usually understood as ‘the Will’ or ‘Volition’. According to the Intellectualist legend, Intelligence thus commands Volition

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39 He says, for instance, ‘To know operatively the rules [of calculation] is to know how to calculate’ (1940, 37).
40 He makes at least two further points in ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’ that foreshadow ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’. The first is that knowledge how to behave does not cause a person to behave in a certain way but, rather, is a disposition to behave, feel, and even think in certain ways (1940, 34 & 38). And the second is that such a view denies ‘the hallowed distinction between cognition, emotion, and volition’ (1940, 38). The latter point, especially, will be important in discussing Ryle’s post-1945 work on know-how and virtue.
41 Ryle (1945a, 1). Despite the hedging “perhaps”, we can nonetheless safely call Ryle’s attitude toward Plato’s account one of ‘disparagement’. It is a career-long objective of Ryle’s to oppose tripartition and even partition. John Ackrill’s (1970) ‘In Defense of Platonic Division’, has Ryle’s attempts as their subject.
to effect a given action and, so long as the agent is not subject to overly strong Appetite, Volition does so. The result is intelligent human action, rather than, for instance, overly appetitive or honour-seeking action.\footnote{These three (including Appetite) are akin to the Reasoning, Spirited, and Appetitive parts of the soul in Plato's tripartite account in the \textit{Republic}. Ryle seems to have disliked the \textit{Republic} from early on. He reports in his ‘Autobiography’ that the many ‘Plato-venerating philosophy tutors’ at Oxford ‘treated the \textit{Republic} like the Bible, and to [Ryle] most of it seemed, philosophically, no better’ (Ryle 1970, 2).}

As already noted, Ryle’s main strategy in arguing against this account is to show that it results in vicious regress. His general explanation of why it does so is as follows. The Intellectualist legend assumes that Volition is incapable of considering regulative propositions. But unless it \textit{is} capable of considering regulative propositions, Volition could never effect actions in accordance with them. That is, unless Volition is able to understand the propositions commanded by Intelligence (and, hence, itself \textit{think}) it will be incapable of applying those propositions. To effect action, then, Ryle says, Volition must itself have a faculty of Intelligence (call it ‘Intelligence*’). But given that Intelligence on its own is supposed to be unable to effect action, Volition will also require its own faculty of Volition (call it ‘Volition*’); and because Volition* will need to understand the regulative propositions commanded it by Intelligence*, it will in turn require its own faculty of Intelligence (call it ‘Intelligence**’) – and so on. The result is that infinitely many tasks of thinking will need to be completed before intelligent action can occur. And this, he suggests, implies that the Intellectualist legend is an absurd one.

The most general lesson that Ryle draws from this regress is that the Intellectualist legend cannot be right, at least in detail. But the more specific lesson, and the lesson that he puts to use in the remainder of the paper, is that intelligence is required not only for considering propositions but for applying them. Ryle himself actually introduces this principle into the Intellectualist legend, to explain how Volition might be able to apply the propositions given it by Intelligence. But the subsequent regress is meant to show that the point must be understood in a particular way: viz., as meaning that applying a proposition cannot be just another instance of thinking.\footnote{Ryle (1945a, 6)} This is why, as we saw above, Ryle concludes that a person’s intelligence must be able to be as directly exhibited in some of his doings as it is in some of his thinking. For it is by assuming that intelligence is only directly manifested in \textit{thinking} that the Intellectualist legend ends in vicious regress. It assumes that Intelligence can only think and not act, so even giving Volition such a faculty to carry out the thoughts of Intelligence does not help to explain how it could apply those thoughts. Somewhere along the way,
intelligence must be exhibitable directly in doings that are not acts of thinking. The Intellectualist legend had only seemed tenable, Ryle thinks, because that point had not been properly recognized.

How does the point that applying propositions takes intelligence bear on the seemingly disparate question of whether virtue is a kind of knowledge? We see the answer only gradually. A few pages later, in the second aside that concerns us, Ryle claims that the Intellectualist legend explains why Aristotle’s treatment of akrasia fails. Having just said that applying truths requires intelligence and that knowing how to apply a truth cannot be a matter merely of knowing some further truth(s), he makes the following aside:

This is the point where Aristotle’s attempted solution to Socrates’ puzzle broke down. “How can the back-slider know moral and prudential maxims and still fail to behave properly?” This is only a special case of the general problem. “How can a man be as well-informed as you please and still be a fool?” “Why is a fool not necessarily an ignoramus?” (1945a, 6)

He does not tell us what he takes Aristotle’s attempted solution to Socrates’ puzzle to be, but we know what it was: the akratic agent, Aristotle says, knows but doesn’t know (NE 1147b1-18). I state this ambiguously because it is a matter of debate precisely what Aristotle intends. It might mean that the akratic agent ‘knows the relevant maxim or proposition but not really’ (i.e., knows it partially but not fully) or it might mean that they ‘know one proposition but not another’.44 For Ryle to think that Aristotle’s solution fails, however, and fails in a way predicted by the Intellectualist legend, he must think that the correct interpretation is the latter. He must think that Aristotle’s view is that the akratic agent considers the relevant proposition but lacks knowledge of another proposition that, if it were known, would enable the agent to act in accordance with the first. Aristotle, too, then, as Ryle understands him here, succumbs to the Intellectualist legend.

44 And, indeed, the Aristotle passage does seem to be ambiguous:

‘The explanation of how ignorance is dispelled and the incontinent [i.e., akratic] recovers his knowledge is the same as in the case of the person who is drunk or asleep, and is not peculiar to this way of being affected. We must refer here to the natural scientists.

Since the last premise is both a belief about what is perceived, and controls actions, it must be this that he does not have when he is being affected, or this that he has in such a way that the having of it amounts not to knowing it, as we saw, but saying the words as the drunk speaks the words of Empedocles.

And because the last term does not seem to be universal, or related to knowledge in the same way as the universal term, the result Socrates was seeking seems to follow. The knowledge present when someone comes to be affected by incontinence, and that is ‘dragged about’ because he is affected, is not what is thought to be real knowledge, but only perceptual knowledge.’
Ryle’s alternative to the legend, as well as his own solution to Socrates’ puzzle of akrasia, turns on his notion of knowledge-how. On Ryle’s account, whereas knowledge-that involves the ability merely to think or consider true propositions, knowledge-how involves an ability to intelligently act in accordance with them. Whereas exercising knowledge-that means merely ‘acknowledging principles in thought’, exercising knowledge-how means ‘intelligently applying them in practice’ (Ryle 1945a, 8). And knowledge-how, according to Ryle, is the more basic. ‘Rules, like birds,’ he says, ‘must live before they can be stuffed’ (ibid., 11).

Ryle’s distinction has faced various challenges since he first discussed it. But what is important for our current purposes is just how he puts the distinction to use in answering the question whether virtue is a kind of knowledge. Virtue, he says in the third aside relevant to us, is a kind of knowledge-how. And this, he thinks, helps to solve not only Socrates’ puzzle about akrasia but also a further Socratic puzzle about why virtue cannot be taught by lecture alone. The agent in possession of knowledge-how, Ryle says, possesses a dispositional excellence, an excellence of character as concerns the action or activity they know how to perform, and this excellence is not something that can be taught by imparting propositions alone but, rather, requires training or discipline:

Socrates was puzzled why the knowledge which constitutes human excellence cannot be imparted. We can now reply. Learning-how differs from learning-that. We can be instructed in truths, we can only be disciplined in methods. (ibid., 15)

Virtue is a kind of knowledge-how, rather than knowledge-that, and knowledge-how, Ryle suggests, cannot be ‘imparted’. If correct, this not only explains why virtue cannot be imparted, but also solves Socrates’ puzzle about akrasia. The akratic agent possesses propositional knowledge of the relevant kind but not knowledge how to behave. As a result, they are not disposed to act in an excellent way.

Ryle makes a similar point in the fourth and final aside relevant to our discussion. Shortly after making the previous point, he suggests that though Aristotle’s “ἐθισμός” (ethismos) is standardly translated as “habituation”, it is better understood as meaning ‘having become disciplined’.45 Ryle is thinking here of habituation as resulting in a kind of mindless behaviour, whereas discipline results in knowledge-how, an intelligent ability to act in certain ways. At least in this respect, then, Ryle interprets Aristotle’s account of ethical virtue as correct, as acknowledging that the virtuous agent has learned how to act correctly. He merely insists that

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45 Ryle (1945a, 15)
this should be understood as the acquiring of knowledge-how, rather than knowledge-that – since virtue, as he understands it at this point, is a kind of knowledge-how.

1.2.3 Subsequent Work on Virtue and Knowledge

It is commonly held that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle had argued fairly convincingly that virtue is not a skill (τέχνη/technē). It is unclear whether in arguing in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ that virtue is a skill, Ryle recognizes himself as disagreeing with Aristotle on that point. Whatever the case may be, he later comes to abandon the view himself, for reasons that are, if not exactly Aristotelian, certainly related to Aristotle’s own.

Kremer (2017) comments briefly on this change in Ryle’s position. Noting some of the connections Ryle makes between know-how and virtue, Kremer agrees that at the time of the presidential address and even earlier, Ryle holds that virtue is a skill. He says, however, that as early as *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle has begun to be suspicious of the idea — adding that, by the end of his career, he has come to think that virtue is not any kind of knowledge. The trajectory of Ryle’s thought on the matter, however, is more complex than this suggests. For, first, even after *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle returns (at least for a time) to the view that virtue is a kind of knowledge. And even in his final publication on the topic, though he concludes by saying that virtue is not a kind of knowledge, there is some tension in his view. Here, I briefly discuss three post-1945 works in connection with these points: *The Concept of Mind* (1949), ‘On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong’ (1958), and ‘Can virtue be taught?’ (1972).

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle does not say that virtue is not a kind of knowledge. But we do see him hesitating in speaking of ‘moral know-how’, and we do see him implying that such know-how would have to be dissimilar from other kinds. As we will see momentarily, both points are evident in the passage Kremer cites in support of his claim that, as early as *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle becomes suspicious of the idea that virtue is a skill. In the passage, as we have seen elsewhere, Ryle is talking of moral knowledge right alongside other kinds of knowledge-how. He talks of it here, for instance, alongside knowledge of Latin. But moral

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46 Ryle does not make explicit reference to *technē* in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’. In his ‘Letters and Syllables in Plato’ (1960), he translates τέχνη as “science”. And in ‘The Academy and Dialectic’ (1965b), he translates it as “art”. And in his ‘Can virtue be taught?’ (1972), though he does not mention *technē* by name, he does refer to Aristotle’s discussions of ‘skill and virtue’ generally, and this “skill” clearly a reference to what Aristotle would have designated by “τέχνη”.

47 Kremer (2017, 36)

48 A fourth relevant piece would be his ‘Jane Austen and the Moralists’ (1966b), but I do not discuss it here.
knowledge, he seems to imply, is of a slightly different sort. He says plainly that knowledge of Latin amounts to knowing how to compose and construe Latin sentences, but he says the following of moral knowledge: ‘[M]oral knowledge, if the strained phrase is to be used at all, is knowing how to behave…’ (Ryle 1949, 316). He thus hesitates in using the phrase “moral knowledge” at all. This implies that the subsequent, ‘…is knowing how to behave,’ should be taken with a grain of salt. He seems to be having misgivings about the idea that virtue is a kind of knowledge, thus also about the idea that it is a kind of knowledge-how.

In the remainder of the quoted passage, we see a first sign that Ryle’s reasons for having these misgivings might be similar to Aristotle’s own for denying that virtue is a technē. The whole of the passage is as follows: ‘[M]oral knowledge, if the strained phrase is to be used at all, is knowing how to behave in certain sorts of situations in which the problems are neither merely theoretical nor merely technical’ (ibid.). He thus implies that even if moral knowledge is a kind of know-how, it is not a merely technical kind; it is not a mere skill like being proficient at hitting a bullseye when one tries.49 Unfortunately, if he has a more filled-out view at this time, he does not attempt to explain it.

In the later ‘On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong’ (1958), Ryle has filled out his view on the matter to some degree, but he no longer has any misgivings about virtue’s being a kind of knowledge. His main topic, he says, is a puzzle first expressed by Aristotle – Why can we not forget the difference between right and wrong? – though it turns out that his question is not quite Aristotle’s. Aristotle’s is a psychological question, about why the virtuous person tends to remain virtuous, whereas Ryle’s is a conceptual question, about why it does not make sense to say that one has ‘forgotten’ what one once ‘morally knew’.

His answer involves the claim that whereas genuine moral knowledge has care (or love, or enjoyment, or admiration) as a component, theoretical and technical knowledge do not. He brings out this point with an example concerning skills:

A person who has received technical instruction in tennis, music, or landscape gardening may, but may not, owe to his instructor a second debt of gratitude for having taught him also to enjoy these things…Learning to enjoy, to love, or to

49 Indeed, earlier in The Concept of Mind, Ryle refers directly to Aristotle on this point, though not directly in relation to knowing-how:

Aristotle realized that in talking about motives we are talking about dispositions of a certain sort, a sort different from competences; he realized too that any motive, unlike any competence, is a propensity of which it makes sense to say that in a given man in a given walk of life this motive is too strong, too weak, or neither too strong, nor too weak. He seems to suggest that in appraising the moral, as distinct from the technical, merits and demerits of actions we are commenting on the excessive, proper or inadequate strength of the inclinations of which they are exercises.’ (Ryle 1949, 112)
admire is not acquiring a skill or a parcel of information. Nonetheless it is learning. (Ryle 1958, 385)

Similar to skill at tennis or music or landscape gardening, moral knowledge must be acquired; but what is learned in acquiring moral knowledge is not a mere skill or factual information. Just as the person merely proficient at tennis may enjoy or not enjoy tennis itself, so the person proficient at behaving well may enjoy or not enjoy behaving well itself. But unlike skill at tennis, which one can possess without caring about doing well in tennis, moral knowledge does require caring about right and wrong and behaving well.

Rather than claiming that moral knowledge is a ‘strained phrase’ as he did in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle here claims that philosophers have been too stingy with it and related concepts. He says that the notions of *learning, studying, teaching*, and *knowing* are ‘ample notions than our academic epistemologies have acknowledged’ (ibid., 385). And in response to the objection that learning to admire or enjoy is a two-part process comprised of coming to know and coming to enjoy, he asks (and answers),

Why not add that sometimes coming to know is, also, *inter alia*, coming to admire or enjoy?…The reply that what is learned must be either a piece of information or a technique begs the question, since the question is, in part, ‘Why must it be either one or the other?’ (ibid., 387)

Ryle thus thinks it quite natural to talk of genuine moral knowledge as a kind of knowledge, despite its requiring care. And he takes this fact to provide the answer to his puzzle. The reason it makes no sense to speak of forgetting the difference between right and wrong is that moral knowledge requires caring about doing right and not doing wrong, and though one can cease to care, ceasing to care is not the same as forgetting.50 This could explain why, in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle was hesitant to assimilate virtue to theoretical or technical knowledge; but, as in prior work, here he is perfectly comfortable with the idea that it is a kind of knowledge.

Ryle’s final paper on the topic is his ‘Can virtue be taught?’ (1972). I want to look at this paper in some detail. On reading its final pages, it can be easy to think that he has come, firmly and finally, to the view that virtue is not a kind of knowledge. Indeed, that is what he explicitly concludes. This conclusion, however, sits uneasily with other remarks in the paper; and this internal tension casts some doubt on the sturdiness of his final position. I will argue

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50 As McGrath (2015) has pointed out, Ryle’s reasoning here is perplexing. Even if knowing the difference between right and wrong does involve care, it is unclear why “ceasing to care is not forgetting” would entail “forgetting the difference between right and wrong is conceptually impossible”. Why not rather say that because caring is merely a part of knowing the difference between right and wrong, it is possible to forget the difference between right and wrong? I return to this argument of Ryle’s in §5.4.
that we thus have two options for reading this final paper: one which resolves the tension by ascribing to Ryle a simple mistake and one which sees this final paper rather as a microcosm of his career-long vacillation on the relation between virtue and knowledge. I do not, however, try to decide between these options.

As the title of the paper suggests, Ryle is once again concerned with Socrates’ question of whether virtue can be taught. More specifically, he is concerned with a particular version of that question: why there are no professional teachers of virtue. He considers an answer inspired by Aristotle (viz., that virtues, like skills, cannot be taught by lectures alone but only by supervised practice), but he notes that this does not actually answer Socrates’ question. For it does not explain why there are no professional teachers of virtue, even though there are swimming coaches and golf professionals and laboratory demonstrators. He believes, that is, that Socrates is asking not only why there are no professional teachers of virtue but, as it were, why the idea of a ‘professional teacher of virtue’ does not make sense.

In beginning to give his own answer, he repeats much of the content of his 1958 paper. He again argues that acquiring virtue is not just a matter of acquiring information and not just a matter of acquiring technical knowledge – claiming again that it is rather, at least most basically, a matter of coming to care about certain things:

We have now got Socrates’ central question ‘How, if at all, can virtue be taught?’ separated off from questions about acquiring information and acquiring proficiencies; and the odd thing about this central question now is that in one way we all know the answer to it perfectly well. We remember how our parents reprimanded certain sorts of conduct in quite a different tone of voice from that in which they criticized or lamented our forgetfulness or our blunders…In these and countless affiliated ways we were, in a familiar sense of ‘taught’, taught to treat, and sincerely treat, certain sorts of things as of overwhelming importance… (Ryle 1972, 441)

And in posing the same potential objection from the 1958 paper that coming to care is not learning anything, he again implies that philosophers have been too stingy with their epistemic concepts. Here, though, he is even more liberal with those concepts, implying that caring sometimes amounts even to knowing:

One source [of resistance to the thought that coming to care is learning something] is this. In our abstract theorizing about human nature we are still in the archaic habit of treating ourselves and all other human beings as animated department stores, in which the intellect is one department, the will is another department and the feelings a third department… So we take it for granted that as the intellect is notoriously the one department into which lessons go, our wills and feelings are
not themselves teachable. They cannot know anything; they cannot be more or less cultured or cultivated… This department store yarn is sheer fairy-story.’ (Ryle 1972, 442)

Ryle seems here to have given up on his earlier position that caring cannot amount to knowing; for he expresses a distaste for the view that the will and feelings are not themselves teachable and cannot know anything. And though he also expresses a distaste for the ‘department store’ talk in which this point is expressed, the intended lesson certainly seems to be that coming to care can amount to a kind of learning and of coming to know.

Further, in seeming to move beyond his 1958 position that caring cannot amount to knowing, these passages would seem to indicate a doubling down on his 1958 position that virtue is a kind of knowledge. In 1958, he had held that position despite thinking that care (one necessary component of virtue) is not a kind of knowledge. So if he now holds that care sometimes is a kind of knowledge, it would seem that should only strengthen his commitment to the view that virtue is as well.

As I have already mentioned, however, he in fact concludes otherwise. He concludes that virtue is not a kind of knowledge. He goes on to assert again that to have acquired virtue is not a matter of having become well-informed (not a kind of informational knowledge) and that it is not a matter of having come to know how to do anything (not a kind of technical knowledge); but he then says not that virtue is some other kind of knowledge (as he had allowed in 1958) but, rather, that it does not very comfortably wear the label of “knowledge” at all, since it is to be honourable [for instance], and not only or primarily to be knowledgeable about or efficient at anything… Where Socrates was at fault was, I think, that he assumed that if virtue can be learned, then here, as elsewhere, the learning terminates in knowing. But here the learning terminates in being so-and-so, and only derivatively from this in knowing so-and-so – in an improvement of one’s heart, and only derivatively from this in an improvement in one’s head as well. (Ryle 1972, 444)

First, then, Ryle now seems to hold that informational and technical knowledge are the only kinds of knowledge. For he argues that virtue is not a matter of knowledge in part because it is neither of those. And, second, he now seems to imply that caring cannot amount to knowing. He contrasts ‘being so-and-so’ with ‘knowing so-and-so’, and the former is clearly meant to be a matter, most basically, of caring. An improvement in one’s heart is now contrasted with coming to know anything, whereas the earlier passages seemed to aim precisely at discounting that tendency. There would seem, then, to be a tension in Ryle’s thinking here. There is at least a tension in what he has in fact written.
Unfortunately, I do not think the tension can be resolved within the paper itself. There are two *prima facie* routes for doing so, but neither succeeds. First, one might interpret Ryle’s contrast of “being so-and-so” with “knowing so-and-so” not as denying that caring can be a kind of knowing (hence not as contradicting the earlier passages) but, rather, as asserting that even though caring sometimes is a kind of knowing, what is *not* a kind of knowing is the state one reaches when one’s cares have led to corresponding changes in one’s ‘other departments’. In other words, one might interpret him as saying that even if each of the components of virtue is a kind of knowledge, virtue itself is not. Virtue, in that case, is more than the sum of its parts.

The problem with this interpretation is that after the above passage, Ryle goes on to express again the view that caring is *not* a kind of knowing, repeating his reason from 1958. He says that while ‘the acquisition of skills and keennesses [i.e., cares] can both be called ‘learning’[…] the losing of skills and keennesses cannot both be called ‘forgetting’’. For only what can be forgotten can be known; so, caring is not a kind of knowing. And this simply re-emphasizes the tension with the earlier implication that caring can amount to knowing, rather than resolving that tension.

Alternatively, then, we might hope that his answer to the main question of the essay (‘Why are there no professional teachers of virtue?’) is of help, as this answer itself turns on what he takes for the nature of care. The first part of his answer is, again, that virtue requires learning to *care* about the right things. And the second part is that trying to teach someone to care, with precisely that as one’s aim, is bound to fail. Speaking specifically of moral teaching, he says the following:

> [I]n matters of morality as distinct from techniques, good examples had better not be set with an edifying purpose. For such a would-be improving exhibition of, say, indignation would be an insincere exhibition… The example authentically set would be edifyingly *shamming* indignation. (Ryle 1972, 446; emphasis added)

The point, then, is that in having as one’s aim to teach someone to care about something, one can only be teaching them *sham* care. And in that case, a professional teacher of virtue (because, in part, an intentional teacher of care) will necessarily be a failure. Ryle thus holds here that though cares can be learned, they cannot be taught.

He does not say so, but it may be that he takes this to be another criterion for knowledge – viz., that if something can be learned but not taught, it is not knowledge. That

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51 Ryle (1972, 445)
would be consistent with the claim in the latter part of the paper that care is not a kind of knowledge, as well as explaining the conclusion that virtue is not either. But in addition to being a bad reason – e.g., I cannot be taught how flowers smell, but I can certainly know – the point again only serves to reiterate the tension with the earlier passages, rather than resolve it. Whereas in the earlier passages he implies that care can amount to knowledge, in the latter he denies this.

This leaves us with two options in reading this final paper. The first is to ascribe to Ryle a simple mistake: he intended to imply, as he does, that the will and feelings can become learned, cultured, or cultivated but not that they can know anything. We could here imagine that if the latter implication had been brought to his attention, he would have disavowed it and, perhaps, expressed himself differently, making clear from the start that he does not think that caring can be a kind of knowing. This reading would straightforwardly resolve the paper’s internal tension. On the other hand, we might think that Ryle’s thinking at the time is simply unsettled, much as it was in regard to the same topic in *The Concept of Mind*. The final paper would then be an exemplification of his career-long vacillation on the topic, rather than expressing a final and settled position. This latter reading, though it would not resolve the paper’s tension, would be in keeping with a philosopher who viewed philosophers as properly unsettled and constantly taking up questions anew, as concerned with practice and method rather than answers – as more like an ‘ebbing tide’ than the ‘sediment’ it leaves behind.52

§1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to introduce a new aspect of Ryle’s thinking on knowledge-how – an ethical aspect, exemplifying itself both in his concern with the question of whether there is any sense to being a philosopher and in his concern with the question of whether virtue is a kind of knowledge. In regard to the former, he seems to have been fairly constant in thinking that knowledge-how secures the status of the philosopher and philosophy. The philosopher’s proper concern is with method, rather than answers – so their proper kind of knowledge is knowledge-how, rather than knowledge-that. And in regard to the latter, while he begins by thinking that virtue, too, is a kind of know-how, he later comes to hold not only that virtue is not a kind of know-how but, further, (though perhaps with some tension) that it is not a kind of knowledge at all.

52 Ryle (1937, 320)
In the remainder of this thesis, I will be thinking about skill and virtue and their relation in a roughly Rylean spirit. I will be arguing eventually, however, that while Ryle was correct to think of virtue as requiring a kind of care, he was incorrect to consequently give up on the idea that virtue can be understood as a kind of skill. In that case, if there is tension in ‘Can virtue be taught?’, it is a potentially fruitful tension. I return to it and the connection between skill and virtue in the final two chapters of the thesis.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I leave virtue to the side and focus on skill and know-how, discussing some of the central issues that have arisen in the debate since Ryle’s initial discussions. More specifically, my concern will be with the question of whether knowing-how really is the same as possessing a skill. While Ryle uses the two terms synonymously (at least in his better-known works53), many in the recent debate have offered more varied accounts of their relation. I will be doing the same, arguing that knowing-how sometimes is possessing skill. I hope to show that such a view is compatible with Ryle’s most explicit lesson in discussing know-how: again, that a person’s intelligence can directly manifest in doings other than acts of thinking.

In Chapter 2, I will be most concerned with the question of what knowledge-how is knowledge of. I focus on one of the answers that Ryle gave to this question, which has largely been forgotten in the current ‘mainstream’ debate about know-how – the view that knowing-how is knowing rules.54 And in Chapter 3, I will be using this view to explore the connection between know-how and ability, aiming to support the view that knowing how to do a thing sometimes amounts to possessing skill at doing it. This will set us up to understand ourselves in Chapters 4 and 5 as taking up the project which Ryle initially set for himself: of understanding virtue as a kind of know-how.

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53 We have seen above that in ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’, he uses “knowledge-how” in a broader sense.
54 I do not consider Ryle and Wittgenstein scholars – such as Julia Tanney (e.g., 2000 and 2009) and David Finkelstein (2000) – to be part of this current ‘mainstream’ debate. That debate, as I understand it, does have Ryle in mind, but the centrepiece is Stanley and Williamson (2001).
2.0 Introduction

Knowing how to do things can be difficult. There is a clear sense in which the centipede of the above poem finds herself in such a difficulty. As some philosophers would express her predicament, she lacks a sufficient theory of how to do the thing in question. She cannot give the toad, or herself, a satisfying account of how to run – or at least not a satisfying account of how a centipede, with all those legs, runs. In another sense, however, it seems likely that she has no difficulty at all knowing how to run. And this is what gives the poem its humour. It seems that she could jump up out of the ditch and have some fun of her own, telling the toad ‘This is how to run’, while running off to her next engagement – thus showing that she knows how to run.2

1 This is a version of a poem that seems to have originally appeared in Katherine Craster’s *Pinafore Poems* (1871). Her centipede, in turn, seems to be the one alluded to by Ryle (1951, 256) and Sellars (1963, 1).

2 Another point commonly made here is that the centipede’s trying to think of how to run is keeping her from being able to run. (This must be ‘specific’ ability, rather than ‘general’ ability, in Honoré’s (1964) sense – the former requires success on the occasion(s) in question, while the latter merely requires success generally.) The point, in that case, is that when one thinks about how to do a thing while trying to do it, it can become difficult to do the thing properly. George Humphrey (1923) coined this psychological effect “centipede syndrome” (after the centipede of this poem); it is also referred to as “hyper-reflection”. This is the kind of point Ryle (1951, 256) makes in mentioning the centipede. More
The case of the centipede thus seems to give us two senses of the expression “knowing how to \( \phi \)”. On the one hand, it gives us a sense of that notion entailing that the individual in question is able to \( \phi \). This is the sense in which the centipede does know how to run; for running is exactly what we imagine she would do if she weren’t so distracted by the fact that she cannot think or say how to run. On the other hand, the case of the centipede also gives us a sense of “knowing how to \( \phi \)” that entails an ability other than the ability to \( \phi \). For, again, the most straightforward meaning of the claim that the centipede lay in the ditch ‘not knowing how to run’ is that she is unable to think or say how to run, rather than that she is unable to run.\(^3\)

In making evident these two senses, the poem presents a unique challenge for the three main positions in the current know-how debate. These positions consist of the following views, respectively:

1. that knowledge how to \( \phi \) is a species of propositional knowledge (sometimes called ‘propositionalist intellectualism’)
2. that knowledge how to \( \phi \) is a species of objectual knowledge (e.g., knowledge of a way to \( \phi \)) that entails propositional knowledge (sometimes called ‘objectualist intellectualism’)
3. that knowledge how to \( \phi \) is a species of ability to \( \phi \) (sometimes called ‘anti-intellectualism’)\(^4\)

The challenge for each of these views in light of cases like the centipede’s is to explain the variation in whether knowledge how to \( \phi \) entails the ability to \( \phi \). For the propositionalist intellectualist, this means explaining how propositional knowledge could sometimes entail the ability to perform the activity or action-type in question and sometimes not.\(^5\) For the objectualist intellectualist, it similarly means explaining how objectual knowledge could sometimes entail the ability to perform the activity or action-type in question and sometimes

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\(^3\) Bengson & Moffett (2007) have argued that “knowing how to \( \phi \)” does not admit of different senses. They offer four tests in favour of this view: conjunction reduction, verb phrase deletion, contradiction elicitation, and a ‘multiple readings’ test. I doubt that these tests can establish what they aim to establish, for if one thinks that “knowing-how” does admit of different senses, one is likely also to have different intuitions as to the results of the tests.

\(^4\) Notice that especially the positions here labelled as forms of ‘intellectualism’ are prima facie distinct from what we discussed as ‘Intellectualism’ in the previous chapter. The latter is the view that intelligence is directly manifested only in thinking. I return to this potential contrast in §3.4.

\(^5\) Classically, at least, that possibility had been rejected. See, e.g., Stanley and Williamson (2001). I discuss this again in §3.4.
not. And, finally, for the anti-intellectualist, it means explaining how knowledge how to $\phi$ could sometimes not entail the ability to $\phi$.

This and the next chapter are concerned with the proper way of meeting this challenge. I aim both to show how it can be met and to critique some other recent attempts to do so. I will be understanding the challenge as that of explaining how one’s account of ‘what knowledge-how is knowledge of’ fits with the fact that knowing how to $\phi$ sometimes entails the ability to $\phi$ and sometimes does not. This clearly puts the anti-intellectualist at a disadvantage, since they do not offer an account of what knowledge-how is knowledge of. As intellectualists have claimed various ways of meeting the challenge, however, it makes sense to focus on their attempts. We will see in Chapter 3 that intellectualists tend to take the challenge to be a substantive one, requiring extra theoretical machinery. I will be arguing, on the contrary, that the challenge is rather easily met. In taking up this point, I also return to the anti-intellectualist position.

In the present chapter, I will be discussing the issue of what knowledge-how is knowledge of. Though I largely do so by arguing for a particular view of what knowledge-how is knowledge of, my intentions are at least in part ecumenical. The view I defend is that knowledge how to $\phi$ (for any action-type or activity ‘$\phi$-ing’) is knowledge of the rule or rules of $\phi$-ing. As we have seen, this is a primary way in which Gilbert Ryle understood know-how. But recent philosophers have greatly preferred accounts given in terms of ways or methods of $\phi$-ing. Ryle, however, also described know-how in terms of ways and methods; so he seems to have understood the two kinds of view as compatible. In defending the view that knowing-how is knowing rules, I hope to show that they are compatible and also to make more explicit

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6 Explaining this was in fact a main aim in the development of objectualist intellectualism. I discuss the objectualist intellectualism of Bengson & Moffett (2007; 2011a) later in the present chapter and, in particular in regard to ability, in Chapter 3.

7 At least Carr (1981), Bengson & Moffett (2007), Stanley (2011), and Pavese (2015a) have made such attempts. I believe that Bengson and Moffett (2007) show Carr’s account’s inadequacies, and I believe that Stanley’s view is successfully criticized by Pavese (2015a). In this and the next chapter, I thus focus on Pavese and Bengson & Moffett’s views. In addition, Devitt (2011) and Wiggins (2012) hold that knowledge how to $\phi$ only sometimes entails ability to $\phi$; but they do not try to explain why that would be.

8 Which term is appropriate (“rule” or “rules”) will depend on the activity as well as on how the activity is being described. So, for instance, while I would say that knowing how to reason according to modus ponens is knowing a rule (viz., modus ponens), I would likely say that knowing how to play basketball is knowing the rules of basketball. If we wish, however, we can also construe the rules of basketball as one conjunctive rule.

9 E.g., he says, ‘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’ (Ryle 1945a, 3; emphasis added).
their relation. I begin, in §2.1, by offering some initial reasons to think that knowing-how is knowing the rules of an activity. In §2.2, I argue that the view that knowing-how is knowing rules not only entails but is entailed by the main accounts of know-how given in terms of ways or methods. And in the final two sections, I turn to two general kinds of objection to the view that knowing-how is knowing rules: first, that knowing rules is insufficient for knowing how (in §2.3) and, second, that it is both insufficient and unnecessary for knowing how (in §2.4). This will lead us to the main topic of discussion of Chapter 3, the relation between knowing how to φ and possessing the ability to φ.

2.1 An Initial Argument

As commonly understood, rules are explicit or understood regulations or principles governing conduct within an area of activity.\(^\text{10}\) I begin here by offering a prima facie reason to think that knowing-how is knowing rules in this sense. The reason is that when we describe how to do things, our descriptions naturally take the form of imperatives and norms, and these kinds of expression standardly express rules.\(^\text{11}\)

Consider, for instance, the kind of thing we say when describing how to get from one place to another – for example, from Russell Square station to the British Museum: ‘Take Bernard Street toward Herbrand Street. Continue counterclockwise around Russell Square until you reach Montague Place. Then turn left into the museum entrance.’ Or consider descriptions of how to perform a given technique – for example, a salchow in figure skating: ‘Take off from the back inside edge of your skate and land on the back outside edge of the opposite skate after one or more rotations in the air.’ Both of these descriptions are given in imperative form, and it would also be natural to speak in terms of what one ought to do to perform the task in question: ‘To get to the museum, you ought to take Bernard Street toward Herbrand Street. Continue counterclockwise around Russell Square, turn right onto Montague Place, and then turn left into the museum entrance’ or ‘To do a salchow, you ought to take off from the back inside edge of your skate and land on the back outside edge of the opposite skate after one or more rotations in the air.’ Again, as imperatives and norms standardly

\(^{10}\) So while philosophers sometimes distinguish between ‘exhibited’ and ‘governing’ rules, I will be meaning only the latter. I discuss what it might mean to be ‘governed’ or ‘guided’ by a rule in §2.4. Also crucial to this definition is that rules needn’t be explicit; they might rather be understood. The later discussion of guidance will also bring out how a rule might be understood rather than explicit.

\(^{11}\) Ryle (at least in 1945a and 1949) disagrees. I discuss his disagreement more in Chapter 3.
express rules, it would be natural to think that this gives us reason to believe that when an agent *knows* how to do a thing, they know the rules of the relevant activity.\(^{12}\)

Such evidence, however, is defeasible, and we may have good reason to think it outweighed by evidence to the contrary. For in expressing imperative and norms, we can be stating at least three different kinds of thing, not all of which are rules. We can be stating,

1. what one must do to perform the activity or action-type in question *at all* (i.e., stating the constitutive requirements of the activity or action-type);
2. what one must do to perform the activity or action-type *well* (i.e., stating the non-constitutive requirements of the activity or action-type); or else,
3. what one *can* do to perform the activity or action-type (i.e., stating a permission or allowance of the activity or action-type).

The above description of how to do a salchow, for instance, states what is constitutive of doing a salchow. In stating it, we say what one must do to perform a salchow at all – making it an instance of (1). So if, for instance, one takes off from the front *inside* edge of one’s skate (rather than the front outside edge), one has not succeeded in doing a salchow; whereas if one’s arms simply swing out wide while rotating, instead of being held tight to the body, one has still done a salchow, just not a good one. The above description of how to get from Russell Square station to the British Museum, on the other hand, does not plausibly state what is constitutive of doing so. It states either a non-constitutive requirement or else an allowance for performing the task – and is thus either an instance of (2) or (3). If going counterclockwise around Russell Square is *the* most direct way to get from the station to the museum (and “most direct” is our standard for doing it ‘well’), what is stated is a non-constitutive requirement of getting there.\(^{13}\) If, instead, going counterclockwise is simply *one* of a few most direct ways (and “most direct” is again our standard), what is stated is merely an allowed way of getting there.

The problem this seems to pose is that not all of our descriptions of how to do a thing express rules. For while both the constitutive and non-constitutive requirements of an activity or action-type plausibly are rules – they are principles that govern conduct or procedure, delineating what *must* be done to perform an activity or action-type well or at all – allowances are not. They do govern conduct within a particular area of activity, but we do not comfortably

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\(^{12}\) Notice that I have allowed that rules can be expressed in propositional (though normative) form. That means that, in a sense, I accept intellectualism. But this need not commit me to the Intellectualist legend, as that was described in Chapter 1. I defend myself further on this point in §3.4.

\(^{13}\) The requirement is non-constitutive insofar as getting there most directly is not constitutive simply of getting there. However, it of course is constitutive of getting there most directly, so if we re-cast the activity as ‘getting there most directly’, the requirement becomes a constitutive one.
call them ‘principles’; for they do not say what is required but, rather, merely what can be done within an activity, what is not ruled out, and, hence, merely can be chosen and needn’t be avoided. What initially seemed to be evidence for the view that knowing-how is knowing rules, then, now seems rather to be evidence for the view that knowing-how is knowing rules or allowances.\textsuperscript{14}

I think, however, that this conclusion is too quick. It is true that not all of our descriptions of how to do a thing express rules, but that does not mean that knowing-how is not knowing rules. And I think we can begin to resist the conclusion to the contrary by seeing the way in which allowances are related to rules or requirements. First, if one were to look in a rulebook of any kind, one would find allowances. Though not themselves rules, then, allowances are at least part of the rules. For all but the simplest of activities, they help to constitute the rules of activities. How do they do so? It would seem that the allowances of an activity, together, amount to a kind of requirement. For instance, in doing a salchow, one is allowed to rotate one or more times in the air. One is allowed to rotate once, to rotate twice, to rotate three times, etc. But to do a salchow, one must rotate some number of times before landing. These allowances are thus included in the constitutive requirements of salchows as a disjunctive requirement: viz., the requirement to do one or more turns in the air. We can see the same phenomenon in regard to getting from Russell Square station to the British Museum. If going counterclockwise around Russell Square is as direct a way to get to the museum as going clockwise, for instance, then one can either go clockwise or counterclockwise to get to the museum most directly. But, again, one must do one or the other. Taken together as disjuncts, then, these allowances, too, give us a requirement and, hence, a rule of the activity ‘getting to the British Museum most directly’. Though themselves not rules, then, the allowances of an activity together constitute a rule.

Knowing an allowance, of course, does not amount to knowing them all, and it does not amount to knowing them all as disjunctively required. But what, we might ask, is an individual’s situation if a rule contains a disjunctive requirement and the individual knows only some of its disjuncts? What, in other words, if they know some allowances of an activity but not all of them? Do they thereby fail to know what’s required for performing the activity?

\textsuperscript{14} This is similar to the view that Stanley and Williamson (2001) offer of know-how. For they understand the infinitive in “X knows how to φ” as ambiguous between meaning ‘ought to φ’ and ‘can φ’, though they focus on the latter in their discussion.
In beginning to answer these questions, it is useful to note that know-how is generally thought to be ‘gradable’. One can know how to do a thing ‘but poorly’, know how to do it ‘moderately’, or know how to do it ‘well’, for instance.\(^{15}\) The same, then, must be true of anything in terms of which we give an account of know-how. If it is knowing the rules of an activity, for instance, knowing rules must be gradable, too. Can one know a rule or set of rules ‘poorly’, ‘moderately’, or ‘well’? It seems that one can; and this is standardly thought to be measured along two lines: in terms of the number of rules known of the set and in terms of how fully one knows a given rule within the set.\(^{16}\) When a rule has a disjunctive component, for instance, and one knows only some of the relevant disjuncts, one fails to know the rule as fully as one could. This is plausibly the case when one knows only the clockwise way of getting from Russell Square station to the British Museum; one knows what’s required for getting there directly, just not as well as one could. For one would not, for instance, know that going clockwise is just as direct, and one would expect to lose time if the counterclockwise way were blocked off. Coming to know the clockwise way, then, would be coming to know better what’s required for getting there directly.

If this is right, then knowing one or some of the allowances of an activity will be sufficient for knowing what is required for performing the activity. Such knowledge will simply fall on the lower end of the scale for how well the requirements are known. In general, we might think of knowing the rules of an activity as knowing enough of them (both quantitatively and qualitatively) that action in accordance with what one knows would be sufficient for performing the activity – poorly, moderately, or well. Knowing an allowance, on such a view, is clearly sufficient for knowing the rules, since knowing an allowance (the counterclockwise way to the British Museum, for instance) is sufficient for performing the activity, were one to act in accordance with what one knows.

Understanding knowing-how as knowing the rules of an activity or action-type, then, can explain both the intuition that knowing what one can do to perform some activity is sufficient for knowing how to perform it and the intuition that knowing more allowances of the activity entails knowing better how to perform it. It enables us to explain why learning a

\(^{15}\)This is a point that has been made since Ryle (1945a). It has generally been used as a point against know-how being a species of propositional knowledge. Pavese (2017) argues that it should not be.

\(^{16}\)Pavese (2017) calls these ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ gradability, though she does not discuss them in regard to rules.
new way to do something should count as an improvement in one's knowledge how to do it, rather than counting simply as knowledge how to do something else.  

This would seem to be good evidence that knowing-how is knowing the rules of an activity or action-type, rather than knowing the rules or allowances. We have seen that the latter construal is misleading because knowing an allowance is a way of knowing the rules. Knowing an allowance (but not all of them) is sufficient for knowing the rules but insufficient for knowing them as well as one could. So though our descriptions of how to φ seemed initially misleading in virtue of expressing either rules or allowances, we have in the end shown that they do provide us with good reason to think that knowing-how is knowing the rules of an activity.

2.2 Knowing Rules and Knowing Ways

I said earlier that the recent debate has seen a turn away from understanding knowledge-how in terms of rules and toward understanding it in terms of ‘ways’ or ‘methods’. And some who hold the latter kind of view have argued explicitly against the view that knowing-how is knowing rules. In contrast to this, in the previous section I found it very natural to talk in terms of ways, allowances, and rules all at once. In the present section I want further to vindicate the thought that accounts given in terms of rules, on the one hand, and accounts given in terms of ways, on the other, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, I argue for the stronger claim that the most prominent accounts of know-how given in terms of ways entail and are entailed by the view that knowing-how is knowing rules. If knowing-how can be understood in terms of ways, then, that is further evidence for the view that knowing-how is knowing rules. And while I do offer reason to prefer the view that knowing-how is knowing rules, that cannot be taken as evidence for the falsity of views given in terms of ways – the mutual entailment of the two kinds of view shows that if one is correct, the other must be as well.

The two most prominent accounts of know-how given in terms of ways are due, on the one hand, to Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson (2001) and, on the other, to John Bengson and Marc Moffett (2007; 2011a). The former offer a propositionalist intellectualist account, as described above. They understand knowing how to φ as knowing, for some way w,

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17 Of course, in a sense, learning a new way to do something is acquiring knowledge how to do something else – learning the breaststroke, for instance, is acquiring knowledge how to do the breaststroke. But learning the breaststroke is also an improvement in one's knowledge how to swim.

18 Most notably, Pavese (2015b), whose arguments we will discuss below in §2.3
that \( w \) is a way to \( \varphi \). Whereas Bengson and Moffett offer an objectualist intellectualist account. They understand knowledge how to \( \varphi \), simply, as knowing some way \( w \) to \( \varphi \). Though Bengson and Moffett sometimes state their view as the view that knowing how to \( \varphi \) is understanding a way to \( \varphi \), the point in doing so is simply to imply that knowing how to \( \varphi \) entails having a ‘reasonable conceptual grasp’ of that way to \( \varphi \).\(^{19}\) As propositionalist intellectualists plausibly assume the same, however, and as each takes knowing how to \( \varphi \) to entail both knowing a way to \( \varphi \) and knowing, for that way, that \( w \) is a way to \( \varphi \), I treat them here as essentially equivalent.\(^{20}\) Again, my aim is to show that this kind of view is entailed by and entails the view that knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing.

To start, what is a way to \( \varphi \)? The accounts just mentioned go no further than explaining ways as \textit{methods}. I will understand a way to \( \varphi \) as ‘an action-type the performance of which amounts to \( \varphi \)-ing’. Such an action-type may be conjunctive (as when \( \varphi \)-ing involves performing more than one action-type at once) and it may also be temporally ordered (as when \( \varphi \)-ing involves performing more than one action-type successively). As a standard case, however, we can think of swimming. One way to swim is by doing the breaststroke, another is by doing the butterfly, another is simply by treading water. Each of these are action-types the performance of which amounts to swimming. Indeed, on this understanding of ways to \( \varphi \), swimming itself is a way to swim. For swimming is an action-type the performance of which amounts to swimming. Swimming is, as it were, \textit{the} way to swim, since one cannot swim without swimming, and the same will be the case for any activity.\(^{21}\)

We begin to see the connection between ways to \( \varphi \) and the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing by noting that knowing how to \( \varphi \), on each of the accounts we are discussing here, entails knowing what \( \varphi \)-ing is – where this can also be understood as possessing the concept \( \varphi \)-ing. For knowing that some way \( w \) is a way to \( \varphi \), entails knowing that performing \( w \) amounts to \( \varphi \)-ing, and the latter entails knowing what \( \varphi \)-ing is. (So, for instance, knowing that the breaststroke is a way to swim entails knowing what swimming is.\(^{22}\)) Next, we can note that knowing what \( \varphi \)-ing is entails at

\(^{19}\) I discuss the notion of a reasonable conceptual grasp in Chapter 3.

\(^{20}\) See Bengson & Moffett (2007) on the point that each view entails each of the relevant propositional and objectual knowledge states. As I understand it, the debate between these views is simply a matter of whether ‘know-how’-ascriptions (of various kinds) most naturally take propositions or, rather, ‘ways’ as their grammatical object. See especially Bengson & Moffett (2011a) and Ditter (2016) on this point. I return to the issue of propositionality as it concerns the know-how debate in §3.4.

\(^{21}\) If this point seems implausible, I further defend it below.

\(^{22}\) If an agent does not have at least a minimal conception of swimming, they only know that doing the breaststroke amounts to what people \textit{call} ‘swimming’. And if they do not have at least a minimal conception of the breaststroke, they only know that doing what people \textit{call} ‘the breaststroke’ amounts to what people call ‘swimming’.
least minimal knowledge of the rules of $\varphi$-ing. For the rules of an activity or action-type express what it is the doing of which amounts to (and does not amount to) $\varphi$-ing. They say what can and cannot be done in performing that activity or action-type. And what can and cannot be done in $\varphi$-ing is precisely what one knows when one knows what $\varphi$-ing is. For instance, if we conceive of swimming as an activity in which one propels oneself through water using one’s limbs, then to know what swimming is is to know that in swimming, one propels oneself through water using one’s limbs. As noted above, one can of course know what $\varphi$-ing is to a greater or lesser degree – the same, of course, goes for possessing the concept $\varphi$-ing – but to the extent that one knows what $\varphi$-ing is, one will also, to that extent, know the rules of $\varphi$-ing. To have a great knowledge of swimming, for instance, will be to know very well the rules of swimming – the requirements and allowances and, plausibly, their various aims – whereas to have a minimal knowledge of swimming will be to know its rules only minimally.

If this is correct, then on each of the above accounts of know-how given in terms of ways, knowing how to $\varphi$ entails knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing. For, again, we have seen that knowing a way to $\varphi$ entails knowing what $\varphi$-ing is, which entails knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing. And the same will be true of knowing, for some way $w$, that $w$ is a way to $\varphi$. Knowing that entails knowing what $\varphi$-ing is, which entails knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing. Some intellectualists have granted this much. Pavese, for instance, admits that ‘[i]f $\varphi$-ing is a rule-governed activity, then knowing a rule to $\varphi$ is necessary for knowing how to $\varphi$’ (2015b, 180). I now want to argue that knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing entails knowing a way to $\varphi$, as well as knowing that that way is a way to $\varphi$, such that if either of these is sufficient for knowing how to $\varphi$, so is knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing.

The argument is brief. First, just as knowing a way to $\varphi$ has been understood as entailing knowing that $w$ is a way to $\varphi$ (or, alternatively, knowing $w$ as a way to $\varphi$), so knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing should be understood as entailing knowing that those rules are the rules of $\varphi$-ing (or, again alternatively, knowing them as the rules of $\varphi$-ing). Knowing the rules of $\varphi$-ing, then, entails knowing what $\varphi$-ing is, since one cannot know that some rules are the rules of $\varphi$-ing without knowing what $\varphi$-ing is. And, finally, knowing what $\varphi$-ing is entails knowing at least one way to $\varphi$. For, as we have said above, $\varphi$-ing is a way to $\varphi$; and if one knows what $\varphi$-ing is (possesses the concept $\varphi$-ing), one at least knows that way. It follows that if one knows the rules of $\varphi$-ing, one knows a way to $\varphi$, as well as that $w$ is a way to $\varphi$. Hence, not only is the view that knowing-how is knowing rules entailed by these other views, but they also entail it.
The contentious premise in this argument, I take it, is that \( \varphi \)-ing is a way to \( \varphi \); so let me say more in defence of it. I am not claiming that \( \varphi \)-ing is a ‘kind’ or ‘type’ of \( \varphi \)-ing – just as red is not a kind or type of red, so \( \varphi \)-ing is not a kind or type of \( \varphi \)-ing. But it is, nonetheless, a way to \( \varphi \). One may be led to think otherwise by the common assimilation of ways to possibilities, as opposed to necessities. On such a conception, because one must swim in order to swim, swimming is not a possibility of swimming – hence not a way to \( \varphi \). But possibilities shouldn’t be opposed to necessities in this way. A thing’s being a necessity is compatible with its being a possibility. If a thing is a necessity it is also a possibility. It is, in a sense, the only possibility. So even if one assimilates ways to possibilities, that will not entail that \( \varphi \)-ing is not a way to \( \varphi \).

As I am thinking of ways to \( \varphi \), whether \( \varphi \)-ing is a way to \( \varphi \) depends on whether one can \( \varphi \) and simply be trying to \( \varphi \) – that is, \( \varphi \) without trying to \( \varphi \) in some more specific way. This question is importantly different from another: whether one can \( \varphi \) without \( \varphi \)-ing in some specific way. Clearly, the answer to the latter question is ‘No’. One cannot swim, for instance, without swimming in some specific way – without doing the breaststroke, or the butterfly, or treading water, etc. On the other hand, it at least makes sense to ask whether one can swim without trying to do anything more specific. Can one swim without trying to do the breaststroke or the butterfly or tread water? Can one swim and be trying just to swim? That is the question.

Why should this question matter for whether \( \varphi \)-ing is a way to \( \varphi \)? The answer is that to try to \( \varphi \) is to employ one’s knowledge how to \( \varphi \). If I try to whistle, for instance, I employ my knowledge how to whistle; and if I try to swim, I employ my knowledge how to swim – great or minimal as that knowledge may be. If knowing how to swim is knowing a way to swim, then, it follows that to try to swim is to employ one’s knowledge of a way to swim. And, thus, the important point for our purposes also follows: if one can swim and be trying just to swim, swimming is a way to swim.

So can one \( \varphi \) and simply be trying to \( \varphi \)? To see that the answer to this question is ‘Yes’, it may help to begin by considering simpler action-types than swimming: e.g., reaching for one’s water bottle, inhaling through one’s nose, turning to look at an object moving at the edge of one’s visual field. These are more obviously actions that one can perform without trying to

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23 The breaststroke and butterfly are of course themselves possibilities of swimming. But these are possibilities at different levels of description. So the fact that swimming is the only possibility for swimming does not rule out that the breaststroke and butterfly are also possibilities of swimming.

24 See, e.g., Habgood-Coote (2018) on the relation between know-how and intention.
do anything more specific. In each case, one of course does do something specific – one reaches, breathes, or turns at a specific speed, for instance – but doing the thing in a specific way needn’t be part of what one aims to do in performing the general task. If asked how we do these things, we would likely say, ‘We just do them.’ Our way of doing them is to do them, rather than some more specific kind of them. The question, then, is ‘Why should we think the same is possible of actions generally?’

If we again take for granted that knowing how to \( \phi \) entails knowing the rules of \( \phi \)-ing, it follows that exercises of know-how are also exercises of rule-knowledge. They are instances of being guided by the rules of an activity or action-type. And this helps to explain how it is that one can \( \phi \) without trying to perform any more specific kind of \( \phi \)-ing. For to be guided by the rules of \( \phi \)-ing (rather than the rules of any more specific kind of \( \phi \)-ing) is to be trying to \( \phi \), rather than trying to do anything more specific. If I am governed by the rules of swimming, then, rather than by the more specific rules of the breaststroke or butterfly, I will be trying to swim, rather than trying to do the breaststroke or butterfly. As the rules of these kinds of swimming (as kinds of swimming) are subsets of the rules of swimming, they exclude some ways of swimming. In trying to do the breaststroke, I will thus be more constrained in what I am doing, by its more specific rules, and I will have a more specific aim. But if I am rather guided by the rules of swimming, my aim will simply be to swim. And as one can certainly swim without being guided by any more specific rules, one can swim and simply be trying to swim.

If this is right, there seem to be no obstacles to saying that \( \phi \)-ing is a way to \( \phi \). And in that case, not only does knowing a way to \( \phi \) entail knowing the rules of \( \phi \)-ing, as we concluded above, but knowing the rules of \( \phi \)-ing entails knowing a way to \( \phi \). For knowing the rules of \( \phi \)-ing entails knowing the way to \( \phi \) “by \( \phi \)-ing”. The view that knowing how to \( \phi \) is knowing the

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25 The issue here is not about whether there are ‘basic actions’ (e.g., Hornsby (2013), Lavin (2013), Small (2019)). The idea of a basic action is, roughly, of an action one performs without having to perform any sub-actions out of which the action is built. If I do not need to do anything else in order to lift my arm – if I can simply lift my arm – that is a basic action. Basic action is a matter of the relation between actions and sub-actions, and which actions (if any) one can perform without performing any sub-actions. The idea in which I am interested is rather a matter of the relation between action-types and (not sub-action-types but) kinds of action-types. It is a matter of whether one can perform an action-type without trying to perform any more specific kind of that action-type. (The breaststroke, for instance, is a kind of swimming, rather than a sub-action out of which the action of swimming might be built.)

26 In the final section of this chapter, I endorse a more filled-out view of guidance by a rule. The key point of the view is that being guided by a rule involves being disposed to catch failures to accord with the rule. We can thus add here that if I am guided by the rules of the breaststroke, for instance, I will be disposed to catch failures to be doing the breaststroke. Whereas if I am guided by the rules of swimming, I will be disposed to catch failures to be swimming. And these are clearly distinct.
rules of \( \varphi \text{-ing} \), then, is compatible both with the view that knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing a way to \( \varphi \) and with the view that it is knowing, for some way \( w \), that \( w \) is a way to \( \varphi \). The view that knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing the rules of \( \varphi \text{-ing} \) entails and is entailed by the latter two views. That means that if one is correct, so are the others.

If knowing-how is knowing the rules of an activity, however, this suggests that these other views given in terms of ‘a way to \( \varphi \)’ would benefit from amendment. For if knowing-how is knowing the rules or requirements of an activity, knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing not just any way to \( \varphi \) but is knowing the required way to \( \varphi \) – viz., since one must know the way “by \( \varphi \text{-ing} \)” in order to know how to \( \varphi \). As noted above (n.23), knowing the required way to \( \varphi \), in this sense, is consistent with there being various more specific ways to \( \varphi \), and it is also consistent with the agent’s knowing these more specific ways. As a result, the view that knowing-how is knowing the rules of the activity can explain why coming to know a new way to \( \varphi \) contributes to one’s knowing better how to \( \varphi \), rather than knowing how to do something else. Views given in terms of ‘a way to \( \varphi \)’, on the other hand, cannot. They thus lack explanatory power in the same way as the view that knowing-how is knowing a mere allowance of an activity.

In the remaining two sections of this chapter, I turn to two further kinds of argument against the view that knowing-how is knowing rules: first, that knowing the rules of an activity is insufficient for knowing how to perform it and, second, that knowing the rules of an activity is both unnecessary and insufficient for knowing how to perform it. These arguments, as we will see, take us closer to the relation between know-how and ability, which will be the explicit topic of Chapter 3.

2.3 Rule-Knowledge as Insufficient for Know-How

The main recent proponent of the view that knowing rules is insufficient for knowing-how is Carlotta Pavese (e.g., 2015a, 2015b). As we will see in Chapter 3, Pavese’s arguments form part of a larger project of the same kind I am engaged in here: of giving a general account of what knowledge-how is knowledge of that can be shown to be compatible with the fact that knowledge how to \( \varphi \) sometimes entails the ability to \( \varphi \) and sometimes does not. As we have seen above, she is happy to admit that knowing the rules of \( \varphi \text{-ing} \) (or what she tends to express as ‘knowing a rule to \( \varphi \)’ or ‘a rule for \( \varphi \text{-ing} \)’) is necessary for knowing how to \( \varphi \). In the present section, I present and respond to her arguments against the view that knowing the rules of \( \varphi \text{-ing} \) is sufficient for knowing how to \( \varphi \).
In arguing that knowing the rules of \( \phi \)-ing is insufficient for knowing how to \( \phi \), Pavese uses two kinds of example. The first kind presents an agent who knows a rule for \( \phi \)-ing but who is unable to apply that rule correctly in a situation in which it is called-for. It is then concluded that the agent does not know how to \( \phi \) and, hence, that knowing rules is insufficient for knowing-how. Here is Pavese’s main such example: Gianni, an undergraduate philosophy student at MIT, has normal inferential abilities and is able to reason according to modus ponens. According to the principle that if one has the ability to reason according to a rule, one knows the rule (which Pavese accepts for the sake of argument), Gianni thus knows modus ponens. One day, however, Gianni overhears Professor Van McGee saying that modus ponens fails in particular cases where the premises are complex conditionals.\(^{27}\) As a result, Gianni comes to be unsure whether modus ponens is actually a universally valid rule of inference; and when he next comes to be faced with premises of the form \( p \) and \( \text{if } p \text{ then } q \), where these contain complex conditionals, he is unsure whether modus ponens applies. He recognizes that if modus ponens is universally valid, \( q \) does follow from this instantiation of \( p \) and \( \text{if } p \text{ then } q \), but he is unsure whether this is a valid case of modus ponens. Unbeknownst to Gianni, however, \( q \) does follow from the premises by modus ponens and, thus, modus ponens would be correctly applied in this case. So though Gianni knows a rule for reasoning correctly from these premises (i.e., he knows modus ponens), he does not know how to reason correctly from them. Hence, knowing a rule for \( \phi \)-ing is insufficient for knowing how to \( \phi \).\(^{28}\)

Pavese considers various possible responses to this argument, but the first seems to me very close to the correct one. I will present this response in the present paragraph before saying in the next why I think it is basically correct. The response Pavese considers is that Gianni does not really know modus ponens – that if he did, he would recognize the validity of the argument he is considering. She thinks that this response fails for two reasons. First, Gianni can usually tell when modus ponens is valid, and he can even tell in this case that if it is valid, it warrants \( q \). Based on the above-mentioned principle (that the ability to reason according to a rule entails knowledge of it), this means that Gianni does know modus ponens. And, second, she suggests that if we deny Gianni knowledge of modus ponens, we will also have to deny it of logic professors like Vann McGee, insofar as they do not endorse certain valid instances of it. This is supposed to be an absurd result because McGee, she thinks, clearly does know modus ponens, despite not believing it to be universally valid.

\(^{27}\) See McGee (1985), for the purported counterexamples to modus ponens.

\(^{28}\) Pavese (2015b, 169)
The following points seem to me to explain why the above response is in fact on the right track. McGee and Gianni certainly know modus ponens in a sense, but the sense in which they know it depends on whether modus ponens is universally valid. If it is universally valid, they know it merely in the sense that they understand its meaning; they know what reasoning would be warranted if it were universally valid. But in the sense in which knowing modus ponens entails the truth of modus ponens, they may not know it as well as they could. For, in particular, if modus ponens is universally valid, their knowledge of it is lacking, since they do not know that it is universally valid. We might express this by saying that, though they know for some cases to conclude q, given p and if p then q, they do not know this for all valid cases.

The general point, which we have already discussed above, is that knowledge of a rule is not an all-or-nothing affair. Just as an individual can possess an ability to a greater or lesser degree, so an individual can know a rule to a greater or lesser degree – indeed, it seem this is what we should expect if, as Pavese assumes, the ability to reason in accordance with a rule entails knowledge of the rule. As one’s ability to reason in accordance with a rule varies, so would one’s knowledge of that rule. And, finally, one of the ways in which one’s knowledge of a rule can be lacking is if one fails to know all of the circumstances in which it applies. A rule does not simply say ‘Do A’, but ‘Do A in circumstances C (or D or E)’. Rules, that is, include their circumstances of application. In expressing a rule (and especially in teaching it), we often don’t express the circumstances in which it’s applicable. (Consider: a parent telling a child ‘Don’t lie.’) But a full spelling-out of the rule would include such circumstances. (For example: ‘Don’t lie unless the would-be murderer at the door asks whether you are hosting the would-be victim.’) So if modus ponens is universally valid, it should be understood as the rule ‘to conclude q from p and if p then q no matter the circumstances’ – in particular, in the case of a universally modus ponens, no matter the content of p and q. Whereas if modus ponens has exceptions, that means that modus ponens is to be understood as the rule ‘to conclude q from p and if p then q except in [the exceptional circumstances]’. If we assume that modus ponens is universally valid, then, McGee and Gianni’s knowledge of it is lacking, since they do not know to apply it no matter the content of p and q. And, plausibly, if they knew it better, they would be able to tell that it is valid in this case. Pavese’s first kind of example, then, fails to show that knowing rules is insufficient for knowing-how.

The second kind of example she offers presents an agent who knows a rule for φ-ing, who applies it in a situation in which it is called-for, but does not do so for the reason for which it is called-for. As a result, this agent too is said not to know how to φ. The following is one
such example that Pavese discusses, taken from Katherine Hawley (2003): Sally is out for a winter walk in the hills when an avalanche occurs. She has no idea how to escape avalanches, but she does know how to swim. Lucky for her, she mistakes the snow for water and begins to make swimming motions. Because making swimming motions is a way to escape avalanches, she escapes the avalanche; but despite being a manifestation of her knowledge of a rule for escaping avalanches, she does not manifest knowledge how to escape avalanches. She does not intentionally escape the avalanche; she gets lucky, since the rule she knows and applies (a rule for swimming) just happens to be a rule for escaping avalanches. So while she knows a rule for escaping avalanches, she does not know how to escape avalanches. Hence, again, Pavese concludes that knowing a rule for $\phi$-ing is insufficient for knowing how to $\phi$.\footnote{Pavese (2015a, 17)}

This argument correctly recognizes that the rule Sally applies just happens to be a rule for escaping avalanches – in the sense that Sally does not know that it is a rule for escaping avalanches – but it fails to recognize an important corresponding distinction (noted in in the previous section) between two different ways of knowing rules. One can know a rule that just happens to be a rule for $\phi$-ing or one can know a rule as a rule for $\phi$-ing. As concerns escaping avalanches, Sally possesses the former kind of knowledge, but she lacks the latter. When she applies the rule in question, she does not apply it as a rule for escaping avalanches; she applies it as a rule for swimming. As a result, her swimming motions do not manifest knowledge of the rule as a rule for escaping avalanches. But if she had applied the rule as a rule for escaping avalanches (and done so in response to having found herself in an avalanche), we would say not only that her swimming motions manifest knowledge of the rule as a rule for escaping avalanches but, also, that they manifest knowledge how to escape avalanches – hence, we would say that she knows how to escape avalanches. But in that case, knowing a rule (in the right way) does seem sufficient for knowing-how. And in that case, Pavese’s second argument also fails to show that knowing rules is insufficient for knowing-how.

2.4 Rule-Knowledge as Insufficient and Unnecessary for Know-How

We turn, then, to a final set of arguments against the view that knowing-how is knowing rules. In recent years, the most prominent proponent of such arguments has been Hubert

\footnote{Pavese (2015a, 17)}
Dreyfus. I quickly outline four of his arguments here, before discussing them in more detail below. For simplicity, each is phrased as arguing against the view that knowing-how is knowing rules, but as we will see, the first three entail only that knowing rules is unnecessary for knowing-how, and the fourth entails only that it is insufficient for knowing-how:

1. If knowing-how were knowing rules, then exercises of know-how would involve the contemplation of rules. But they usually do not (at least when all goes well). Thus, knowing-how is not knowing rules.

2. If knowing-how were knowing rules, then exercises of know-how would require knowing a second rule concerning how to apply the first rule, applying the second rule would require a third rule for how to apply the second, applying the third rule would require a fourth rule for how to apply the third – and so on. In other words, if we assume that knowing-how is knowing rules, we encounter a rule-following regress in explaining skillful action. Thus, knowing-how is not knowing rules.

3. If knowing-how were knowing rules, then exercises of know-how would result in action that appears mechanical or robotic, rather than fluid. But usually exercises of know-how appear fluid. Thus, knowing-how is not knowing rules.

4. If knowing-how were knowing rules, we would be able to acquire skills simply by being told the rules of the activity in question. In the majority of cases, however, merely telling a student the rules does not result in skill – skill usually takes practice and training. Thus, knowing-how is not knowing rules.

Dreyfus’s arguments have received a fair amount of attention in the literature, both positive and negative. But I think that a general response is available. The response is that each of the above arguments assumes a conception of rules, our knowledge of them, and our guidance by them, which we need not accept. The first three assume that rules are something like explicitly

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30 He also sometimes puts his view in terms of concepts, such that concept-possession is unnecessary and insufficient for know-how. This fits with my discussion above of the relation between know-how and concept-possession, as well as that of Bengson & Moffett, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

31 Dreyfus (1991, 86). As we have seen, Ryle (1945a) argues similarly about skillful action and contemplating ‘regulative propositions’.

32 Dreyfus (1980, 8-9). This is a common form of argument, seen in Ryle’s (1945a) argument against ‘the Intellectualist legend’, in Wittgenstein’s rule-following regress (e.g., Philosophical Investigations §§185-190 and 198-202), and in Kant’s similar regress (Critique of Pure Reason A133/B172).

33 Dreyfus (2006, 46)

34 Dreyfus (2014, 26ff.)

formulated representations, such that to apply a rule requires thinking the rule. The fourth assumes, more strongly, that applying a rule is thinking it. If one accepts these assumptions, then each of the above arguments will appear sound, or at least plausible. But if one rejects them, as we will see, each argument comes to appear unsound. In what immediately follows, I simply lay out how these assumptions work as suppressed premises in Dreyfus’s arguments. I will argue afterward that we should reject them.

The assumption is most obvious in Dreyfus’s first argument. Again, the argument is as follows: Knowing-how is not knowing rules because, when exercising our skills, we generally do not contemplate the rules of what we are doing – the expert swimmer, for example, does not usually contemplate the rules of swimming when swimming. Dreyfus does allow that we may stop and think of what ought to be done when exercising a skill if we run into problems (e.g., if we find that our hammering is not getting the nail into the board); but he holds that when the exercise of a skill is going well, such thinking is unnecessary – even distracting, as it was for the centipede of our earlier poem. Dreyfus plausibly gets the phenomenology right here – we do not generally, for instance, find ourselves thinking how to walk while walking. But his overall argument only works if exercising knowledge of a rule requires thinking it. For only if that is true would an agent have to think the rule in exercising knowledge of it. If one removes that assumption, it becomes unclear why the argument would go through.

The second argument says that if knowing-how were knowing rules, a prerequisite to exercising know-how would be performing infinitely many acts of applying rules. Why would

36 McManus (2012, chp. 4) argues very similarly. It is worth noting that one might see this view of Dreyfus’s as a result of the fact that he is arguing against a specific tradition – viz., a traditional Cartesian view of mind and action as well as what he and his students (e.g., Haugeland (2017)) see as a modern instantiation of Cartesianism (e.g., as exhibited in Fodor (1975)). In attempting to dismantle that tradition, Dreyfus seems to assume its view of rule-knowledge. (He might thus be an instantiation of Heidegger’s claim that “[e]verything “anti” thinks in the spirit of that against which it is “anti”” (Heidegger (1992, 52-53));) Nonetheless, Dreyfus’s arguments can still be seen as important. For one might understand him as emphasizing problems with a certain view of rules and our knowledge of them, in response to a particular program for understanding intelligence. McManus himself (2012, 86-87) makes such a suggestion, and Haugeland (1998a) seems to do so as well.

37 I use the phrase “thinking the rule” and, later, “thinking how to φ” (rather than “thinking about the rule” or “thinking about how to φ”) because what is at issue is, for instance, thinking occurrently that φ, rather than thinking occurrently about the thought that φ.

38 As noted above (n.2), such considerations of hyper-reflection are a topic Dreyfus discusses elsewhere (e.g., 2007). He argues that because thinking often gets in the way of doing, skill is not an exercise of conceptual or rule-governed capacities. That argument, as I understand it, is subject to the same kind of response that I am discussing here.

39 Dreyfus’s first argument also tacitly relies on the thought that thinking is always phenomenologically accessible, such that if I am thinking, I will be able to tell that I am thinking. This may be true on a traditional Cartesian view of thought – admittedly one of Dreyfus’s main targets – but it is certainly not accepted by those Dreyfus takes to be more contemporary instantiations of Cartesianism (mentioned in n.36).
that be? We can acknowledge, first, that if knowing-how is knowing rules, then exercising know-how (e.g., swimming) is exercising knowledge of a rule or rules – that is, it is a case of applying a rule. But, second, on the plausible assumption that applying a rule itself requires knowing how to apply the rule, exercising knowledge of a rule will also require knowing a second rule concerning how to apply the first – and the regress is started. For applying the second rule will then similarly require knowing a third rule concerning how to apply the second; applying the third will require knowing a fourth concerning how to apply the third; and so on. However, the claim that applying a rule requires knowing how to apply it assumes that applying a rule is an act other than that which one knows how to perform. Much like Ryle’s regress in Chapter 1, it assumes that exercising knowledge of a rule involves performing an act of thinking the rule in addition to the action which one knows how to perform. If we reject that assumption, then, there is no need to think that applying a rule requires thinking even a first rule – thus stopping a possible regress.

The third argument is perhaps less generally plausible than the others, but the same assumption helps us understand why Dreyfus might find it plausible. The crucial premise of the argument is that if knowledge-how were knowledge of rules, skillful action would appear mechanical or jerky, rather than fluid. Why might that be the case? It would be the case if exercising one’s knowledge of a rule meant thinking it, and thinking a rule resulted in hesitations, gaps, or stops in the activity, as it does when we are unsure what we are doing, or stop and deliberate how to go on. If thinking has to occur before each action and, hence, between actions, we might expect to see humans hesitating more often and pausing regularly before and after each action they perform; and yet we don’t see this, or at least not when the agent knows well how to do what they are doing. Dreyfus thus concludes that knowing-how is not knowing rules.40 But denying that rules must be thought disrupts this argument as well. For in that case, the purported reason for expecting hesitation, gaps, and stops in activity (viz., acts of thinking rules) will be absent.

Finally, we have the fourth argument. I want to agree here that students do not acquire skills just by being told the rules; they must practice. The student must practice dribbling to acquire dribbling-skill, must practice adding to acquire adding-skill, must practice speaking to acquire speaking-skill, etc. But why think, as Dreyfus argues, that if knowing-how were knowing rules, being told the rules would be enough to acquire such skill? Well if knowing-how

40 Related is Dreyfus’s thought that his contemporary Cartesian opponents understand rules as concrete, discrete representations, forming part of a ‘mechanical mind’, a mechanical mind that would result in mechanical action.
were knowing rules, and if exercising knowledge of a rule required (and only required) being able to think or contemplate it, then being able to think the rules should (at least sometimes) enable the student to do as the rules say to do. In that case, since being told the rules plausibly is (at least sometimes) sufficient for coming to be able to think them, it would follow that if knowing-how were knowing rules, being told the rules should also be enough for coming to be able to do as the rules say to do. Dreyfus takes up this limited conception of knowing a rule and points out the absurdity of thinking that knowing a rule, so-conceived, could explain an agent’s being able to perform the relevant activity in accordance with the rule. So the idea that exercising knowledge of a rule essentially amounts to thinking it, underlies Dreyfus’s fourth argument.

We have seen then how the assumption functions in his arguments, but do we have positive reason to deny the assumption? I take it that such reason is provided by the very kinds of case that Dreyfus is interested in. For experts, we want to say, act as they do because they know the rules of their activity. And we want to say this despite their exhibiting all the features that Dreyfus notes – lack of need to think the rules, fluidity, and these resulting from practice. The expert basketball player, for instance, plays well and fluidly as a result of practice, dribbles when it’s called-for, shoots when it’s called-for, etc., but does not think ‘dribble while walking or running with the ball’, for instance, nor ‘shoot when open and close to the basket’; she just does these things, without performing any separate acts of thinking. And we want to say that she does these things because she knows to dribble while walking or running with the ball and to shoot when open and close to the basket – that is, because she knows the rules of basketball. Even though she is not thinking the rules, then, her playing as she does is explained by her knowledge of them. And this makes plausible that knowledge of rules is involved in skillful action, despite their not being thought.

Given that this response simply interprets Dreyfus’s cases otherwise, however, he and others like him are likely to need more reason than this to admit that knowing-how involves knowing rules. They are likely to need an alternative positive account of how rules are involved in skillful action. A promising such account has been suggested in work by both John Haugeland (1998b) and Peter Railton (2006). Railton expresses the idea succinctly, in terms of norm-guidance:

Agent A’s conduct C is guided by norm N only if C is a manifestation of A’s disposition to act in a way conducive to compliance with N, such that N plays a regulative role in A’s C-ing, where this involves some disposition on A’s part to notice failures to comply with N, to feel discomfort when this occurs, and to exert
effort to establish conformity with N even when the departure from N is unsanctioned and non-consequential. (Railton 2006, 13)

Being guided or regulated by a rule here is not thinking the rule but, rather, being disposed to notice failures to accord with it, recognize them as failures, and aim to correct them.41 And this would explain how rules are involved in even successful exercises of know-how. For this notion of norm-guidance allows us to say of an individual guided by a norm that if they were to go out of accord with the rules of that activity, they would likely catch it and correct themselves, recognizing their failure as a failure. That is implied by the nature of norm-guidance, on this account. Rules, in that case, form part of an explanation not only of what the agent would do if they were to make a mistake but also of what they are doing when they are not making mistakes. And neither explanation necessarily involves thinking the rule.

In ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ Ryle gives us a similar picture of how rules are involved in skillful action:

In some way the observance of rules…resemble[s] the employment of spectacles. We look through them but not at them. And as a person who looks much at his spectacles betrays that he has difficulties in looking through them, so people who appeal much to principles show that they do not know how to act. (Ryle 1945a, 9)

In normal skillful activity, that is, we perceive the activity and environment in the light of the rules of the activity, rather than perceiving or thinking the rules themselves. This is, amongst other things, how we come to recognize when we have made mistakes in an activity. And it is worth noting that Dreyfus, in noting that the expert is disposed to recognize mistakes, needs access to some such story himself.

Conceivably, one may perform an activity without knowing its requirements; but doing things without knowing their requirements – without knowing what would be failure and what would be success – is not doing things ‘at the level of characteristically human activity’, as Wilfrid Sellars (1963, 1) puts it. To φ at the level of characteristically human activity is to φ guided by the rules of φ-ing. This sets intelligent abilities (i.e., skills) apart from mere abilities. I take it that Stanley (2011), Stanley and Krakauer (2013), and Stanley and Williamson (2016) accept something like this point when they say that exercises of skill are guided by knowledge (i.e., are guided by what is known). Philosophers like Ryle – as well as philosophers inspired

41 Notice that as dispositions are gradable, so will these dispositions that constitute norm-guidance – thus, so will norm-guidance itself. An agent, then, needn’t be perfect at catching mistakes, for instance. to be guided by a norm.
by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty – are often read as denying it.\(^{42}\) Ryle is so, in particular, in denying ‘the Intellectualist Legend’.\(^{43}\) All Ryle denies, however, is a particular kind of guidance. He denies only that the guidance in question is realized by thinking, contemplating, or following rules. He merely denies that in exercising knowledge-how, we must do a bit of theory and a bit of practice.\(^{44}\)

2.5 Conclusion

If the above is correct, we have good reason to think that knowledge-how is knowledge of rules, as well as, hopefully, having gained some clarity on the relation between this view and other common views of what knowledge-how is knowledge of. We have seen some general reasons in favour of the view that knowing-how is knowing rules, have then seen that it is compatible with the standard intellectualist views of what knowledge-how is knowledge of, and have finally responded to two general kinds of argument against it. In doing the latter, we have also begun to think about the connection between knowledge-how and ability, which is the explicit topic of Chapter 3.

The main aim in that chapter will be to explain how it is that knowledge-how sometimes amounts to skill. I aim to do so by way of meeting the challenge introduced at the beginning of this chapter. This was the challenge of showing how one’s account of what knowledge-how is knowledge of fits with the fact that knowing how to \(\varphi\) sometimes entails the ability to \(\varphi\) and sometimes does not. As we will see, in meeting it I will also be critiquing the most prominent propositionalist intellectualist and objectualist intellectualist attempts to meet their versions of the challenge. In doing so, I hope not only to provide some clarity on the relation between know-how and ability but also to bring out some general themes of the debate.

\(^{42}\) As we have seen, Dreyfus does deny it; but others inspired by these philosophers do not – e.g., Haugeland (1998b) and McManus (2012).

\(^{43}\) See Stanley (2011, 5) for an expression of this view of Ryle.

\(^{44}\) Ryle (1949, 29)
Chapter 3
Know-How, Part II:
Know-How & Ability

3.0 Introduction

The present iteration of the know-how debate began without much consideration of the relation between know-how and ability. Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson’s ‘Knowing How’ (2001), the most influential paper in the debate of the last twenty years, instead focused on arguing that the standard semantics for embedded infinitival questions (such as “how to φ”) understand these as having completely propositional content (viz., “that w is a way to φ”). It was in turn simply assumed by Stanley and Williamson that if know-how is propositional in this sense, knowledge how to φ neither is a kind of ability to φ nor entails such ability. They did understand knowing-how as knowing a proposition ‘under a practical mode of presentation’, which gave some hope that there would be room for an underlying connection to ability; but any such connection was denied in the paper itself. Practical modes of presentation are associated merely with ‘certain linguistic constructions’ (viz., those constructions concerning ways of doing things), and the view that ascriptions of know-how ascribe abilities is assumed to be ‘simply false’.¹ In the ensuing debate, this made for a stark contrast between the notions of possessing propositional knowledge and possessing the ability

¹ Stanley & Williamson (2001, 427-428) and (ibid., 416), respectively.
to \( \varphi \). Both propositionalist intellectualists and anti-intellectualists alike assumed that if know-how is a kind of propositional knowledge, it does not entail the ability to \( \varphi \).\(^2\)

In the debate more recently, however, there has been a move away from assuming this stark contrast. As noted in the previous chapter, many intellectualists in particular now aim to show that their view of know-how is compatible with the idea that knowing how to \( \varphi \) sometimes does entail the ability to \( \varphi \). Some propositionalist intellectualists have done so by further developing the notion of ‘practical modes of presentation’, while objectualist intellectualists have turned to other notions. One of the main aims of the present chapter is to evaluate their attempts and to offer an alternative.

I begin in §3.1 by discussing my preferred alternative, relying on the view that knowing-how is knowing rules. I argue that if knowing-how is knowing rules, then knowing how to \( \varphi \) should sometimes entail the ability to \( \varphi \), because knowing the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing sometimes entails such ability. More specifically, I argue that knowing the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing sometimes entails the ability to \( \varphi \) because knowing the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing sometimes in part means being able to \( \varphi \). So, then, does knowing how to \( \varphi \). The view I wish to propose thus saves an aspect of what I called ‘anti-intellectualism’ in the previous chapter, the view that knowing how to \( \varphi \) is a kind of ability. I argue that knowing how to \( \varphi \), at least in one sense of the phrase, is a reliable, intelligent ability to \( \varphi \) – or, in other words, is skill at \( \varphi \)-ing.

The approaches with which I contrast my own in §§3.2 and 3.3 are due to Bengson and Moffett (2007) and Pavese (2015a), respectively. As discussed in the previous chapter, each understands knowledge how to \( \varphi \) in terms of ways to \( \varphi \) – the former offer an objectualist intellectualist view, on which knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing a way to \( \varphi \), while the latter offers a propositionalist intellectualist view, on which knowing how to \( \varphi \) is knowing, for some way \( w \), that \( w \) is a way to \( \varphi \). As discussed in the previous chapter, however, this is not the respect in which these views substantively differ from the view I prefer. Each, I have claimed, is compatible with the others. Their respective attempts differ from my own, rather, in that theirs rely on one or another mediating concept. Bengson and Moffett appeal to what they call ‘ability-based concepts’, arguing that knowing how to \( \varphi \) entails ability to \( \varphi \) only when knowing how to \( \varphi \) requires possession of an ability-based concept. Pavese, on the other hand, appeals to ‘practical modes of presentation’ (or what she, in a Fregean spirit, calls ‘practical senses’),

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\(^2\) These, again, are the positions that knowledge how to \( \varphi \) is a species of propositional knowledge and that knowledge how to \( \varphi \) is a kind of ability to \( \varphi \), respectively.
arguing that knowing how to \( p \) entails the ability to \( p \) only when one grasps a proposition that has as a component a practical sense.

The problematic consequence, as we will see, is that on these views, know-how only ever entails mental ability — ability to perform certain thinking or reasoning operations. Neither, then, can account for the two senses of “knowing-how” tacit in cases like that of the centipede which we considered in the previous chapter. Neither can say that knowing how to run, for instance, sometimes entails being able to run. Bengson, Moffett, and Pavese, then, ultimately subscribe to what Ryle called “the Intellectualist legend”: not merely the view that knowledge-how can be ascribed with statements of the form “\( X \) knows that \( p \)” (i.e., what I have referred to as ‘intellectualism’ — with a lower-case “i” — and myself endorsed) but, more substantively, the view that intelligence only directly manifests in thinking (i.e., ‘Intellectualism’). In §3.4, I return to Ryle’s treatment of Intellectualism and to why a non-Intellectualist view should be preferred.

### 3.1 Ability and Rule-Knowledge

If knowing-how is knowing the rules of an activity or action-type (as argued in the previous chapter), and if there are at least two senses of “knowing-how” (as cases like that of the centipede seem to show), then there should be at least two such senses of “knowing rules” as well. In the present section, I argue that there are two such senses. In particular, I argue that there are different ways of knowing rules, one of which involves being able intelligently to act in accordance with the rules, and one of which does not — hence, there are at least two senses of “knowing rules”.

In Chapter 1 we saw that the early Ryle (in his 1940 paper ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’) is content to distinguish between two kinds of knowledge-how, rather than between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. As we have noted, he more often in this paper refers to these two senses of “knowledge-how” as ‘academic’ and ‘operative’ knowledge, respectively, but he also expresses this distinction in terms simply of knowledge-how, as in the following passage:

In a certain sense, I, having read the text-books and been a spectator, know how to swim; that is, I know what actions people must take to progress in a desired direction in the water, with nostrils clear of the water. But no one would say that I

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3 In saying that each subscribes to the Intellectualist legend, I do not mean to rule out that each does so intentionally. Pavese clearly aims to subscribe to it. With Bengson and Moffett, it is less clear but plausible that they do as well.
really know how to swim or that I have swimming-skill, unless when I do it myself
I usually succeed. (Ryle 1940, 188)

As Ryle understands it here, really knowing how to swim is possessing skill at swimming. But he admits that one can also know how to swim, in a sense, simply from having read a textbook or having observed swimming. And, here, knowledge-how in either sense is understood as knowledge of the same kind of thing – what he alternately calls ‘rules’ or ‘propositions’. We see this, for instance, in the following passage:

To ‘know’ a rule of conduct is to be regulated in one’s conduct. To know properly the rules of grammar is to be able to talk correctly, to correct mistakes and to wince at those of others. A man’s party manners show whether he ‘knows’ the rules of etiquette; his ability to cite ‘Etiquette for Gentlemen’ does not… [S]ometimes appropriate behaviour is part of what we mean by certitude or acceptance of a proposition… (ibid., 187)

Though Ryle is happy to talk here of knowing rules or propositions (and though he is very relaxed as well about distinguishing between ‘knowledge’, ‘certainty’, and ‘acceptance’), he clearly holds that properly or really knowing a rule involves the ability to act in accordance with it, whereas improper or less than proper such knowledge does not.4

In this view lies a tacit answer to our question of why knowing a rule sometimes entails the ability to act in accordance with it and sometimes does not. Generally speaking, the proposal is that one can know a rule in different ways. So, while what is known in each case of knowledge-how is the same kind of thing – viz., a rule – what can vary is how the rule is known. More specifically, the proposal is that while one can know a rule properly or really, one can also know it less than properly, or improperly. These are the ways of knowing a rule tacitly proposed by Ryle as explaining why knowing how to φ sometimes entails the ability to φ and sometimes does not.

I think it is fairly clear that on the most straightforward interpretations of this proposal, it is false. In general, that is, ‘properly’ or ‘really’ knowing a rule (as we are disposed to interpret those terms) does not entail the ability to act in accordance with it. By looking at these interpretations, however, and at why their resulting views are false, I think we are led to a more plausible view. I think we see that Ryle is tempted to think that properly or really knowing a rule entails being able to act in accordance with it because such knowledge sometimes entails

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4 Ryle also clearly intends that proper knowledge of a rule is sometimes a disposition to act in accordance with it. However, he does not draw any distinction between ‘abilities’ and ‘dispositions’ in this paper. This is the point that he later tries to correct by reference to ‘technical knowledge’ and ‘care’, respectively, and is a primary theme of Chapters 4 and 5 of the present thesis.
such ability. But in these cases, “properly knowing” and “really knowing” are mere stand-ins for “knowing such that one is able”; they do not do any real explanatory work. I want to suggest, however, that this is as it should be. There is no need to bring in a substantively explanatory notion here, because knowing how to $\phi$ sometimes partially means being able to $\phi$. When it does, knowing the rules of $\phi$-ing will simply be partly constituted by the ability to $\phi$.

We can begin to see this by looking at what seems the most straightforward interpretation of the claim that properly knowing a rule entails the ability to act in accordance with it. On this interpretation, the point is that knowing a rule as one ought to entails the ability to act in accordance with it. Again, I think the view expressed by this interpretation is false. To see this, consider reasonably competent coaches and players. I think we can agree that coaches and players both know the rules of their sport or activity. But while it is plausible that a player fails to know the rules properly if they lack the ability to play in accordance with the rules, the same is implausible concerning coaches. And the reason seems to be that the rules of playing do not apply to coaches. While a player needs to know the rules such that they are able to play, then, a coach only needs to know the rules such that they are able to coach. And while a player’s being unable to play plausibly does mean that they don’t know the rules properly, a coach’s being unable to play does not.\footnote{Clearly, if a player is injured and in that sense is unable to play, that will not impugn their knowledge of the rules. They must just be able to play in normal (non-broken-leg) circumstances.}

The general implication is that while properly knowing a rule does entail the ability to act in accordance with it for those to whom the rule applies, it needn’t entail such an ability for those to whom it does not apply. It seems Ryle may be misled to make the more general claim by his focus on morality, etiquette, and grammar. For while the rules of those domains plausibly do apply to all of us, they are not the usual case. The rules of a sport generally only apply to those who engage in it, as the rules of playing violin generally only apply to those who attempt to play violin. Hence, generally only those who engage in such activities will need such abilities in order to count as having proper knowledge of their rules – only then will properly possessing the rules entail being able to accord with them.

What, though, of ‘really’ knowing a rule? Might really knowing a rule entail possessing the ability to act in accordance with it? I take it the most straightforward interpretation of this question understands it as asking whether fully or completely knowing a rule entails the ability to act in accordance with it. And I take it that the example of the player and coach shows the inaptness of the resulting view here as well. For if coaches merely incompletely knew the rules,
whereas players know them completely, we should be able to say that if a coach knew the rules better or more completely, they would know them as players do – i.e., they would be able to play. But, again, it seems that a coach can know the rules as well you please without being able to play, can learn the rules better and better and only become a better coach and not a better player. And, further, if players merely knew the rules more completely than coaches, the player’s knowledge should include the coach’s knowledge – the coach’s knowledge, as incomplete in relation to the player’s, would be included in the player’s. But we know that the relation of player-knowledge to coach-knowledge is not like this. We know of good players who coach poorly – just as we know of centipedes who can run but cannot think or say how to run. Really knowing a rule, then, in the sense of fully knowing it, does not on its own entail being able to act in accordance with the rule.

What these points seem to bring out is that while there are different ways of knowing a rule, corresponding to different abilities, these ways are not well-described simply in terms of ‘properly’ knowing the rules (as opposed to improperly or less than properly knowing them) nor in terms of ‘really’ knowing them (as opposed to incompletely knowing them). A coach can know the rules really and properly and they will still know them essentially differently from the way in which the player knows them. They will still not know them, that is, such that they are able to play. Thus, Ryle’s implicit view, that really or properly knowing the rules entails being able to act in accordance with them, cannot be quite right.

In stating this critique, however, we already acknowledge two different ways of knowing rules. Again, one can know a rule ‘such that one is able to act in accordance with the rules’ – that is how the player standardly possesses the rules – and one can also know a rule ‘such that one is able to express them verbally’ – that is how the coach standardly possesses them. Indeed, we might think that this is the point which Ryle himself is onto (though he overstates the point) in emphasizing proper and real knowledge of rules. For though properly or really knowing a rule does not always entail the ability to act in accordance with it, it sometimes does. We have seen this with players, who (qua players) properly know the rules of their activity only if they can play.

Perhaps the most straightforward form of argument for there being different modes or ways of knowing a rule, understood in terms of distinct kinds of ability, points to different ways of learning a rule.\textsuperscript{6} Sometimes, learning the rules of an activity means coming to be able

\textsuperscript{6} Glick (2012) contains an excellent discussion of different ways of learning how to φ.
to act in accordance with those rules. If I am a swimming instructor, for instance, teaching a student the rules of swimming, they will learn how to swim by swimming, and they will count as intelligently possessing the rules of swimming only when they are able to swim. If, on the other hand, I am a university lecturer in the theory of swimming, my students will learn the rules of swimming by reading textbooks, by memorizing my lectures, and by observing swimming; and they will count as intelligently possessing the rules of swimming only when they are able to reproduce those rules in writing or speaking. An Olympic swimmer would not necessarily receive top marks in the theory of swimming; and a top student would not necessarily be able to swim at the level of the Olympic swimmer. While what is being taught in each case, then, can be described as ‘how to swim’, only in the former case of teaching is the end or product the ability to swim. This point is concomitant with the point that a coach’s knowledge of the rules is distinct from a player’s knowledge of the rules, despite both kinds of knowledge being knowledge of the rules.

The resulting ability is intelligent because the rules or norms which the swimming instructor has taught the student now guide the student’s swimming, in the sense introduced in the previous chapter. The student, in acquiring the ability to swim, has at the same time acquired the ability to catch and correct (at least some of) their own mistakes and, hence, to improve their swimming. Whether we think of these abilities as parts or aspects of the acquired knowledge, the result is that the student’s possessing that knowledge in part means that they are more-or-less reliably able to do what they have learned how to do. That is, they have acquired skill at performing the activity in question.

This position is necessarily ‘quietist’ about a question on which the positions I will be discussing below take an explicit stand: viz., When does knowing how to φ entail the ability to φ? The position I have suggested above will answer this question simply by saying, ‘When it does – when such knowledge has such ability as a part.’ This is clearly an uninformative answer, but I think that no further answer needs to be given. The views that I discuss in §§3.2 and 3.3, on the other hand, offer substantive answers. Their answers are, respectively, (1) that knowing

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7 Ryle makes the same point in discussing a trained army recruit:

When the recruit reaches the stage of learning to shoot and read maps he is not drilled, but taught. He is taught to perform in the right way, i.e., to shoot and to use maps with “his head.” Unlike the [circus-]seal [who can be trained to perform various tricks], he becomes a judge of his own performance – he learns what mistakes are and how to avoid or correct them. He learns how to teach himself and so to better his instructions. He acquires not a habit but a skill… (Ryle 1945a, 15)

8 As noted in the previous chapter, Devitt (2011) and Wiggins (2012) seem to take this quietist position as well. Glick (2012) may, too.
how to $\phi$ entails the ability to $\phi$ when one’s knowledge how to $\phi$ involves possession of an ‘ability-based concept’ and (2) that knowing how to $\phi$ entails the ability to $\phi$ when one’s knowledge how to $\phi$ is knowledge ‘under a practical mode of presentation’ (or has a ‘practical sense’ as a component). I will now be taking these views in turn and arguing that each is ultimately unsatisfying.

3.2 Ability-Based Concepts

Bengson and Moffett’s (2007) account of the relation between know-how and ability is an ‘activity-relative’ account. They claim that whether knowing how to $\phi$ entails the ability to $\phi$ is dependent upon the kind of activity in question; and this is because they believe that only for certain activities does knowing how to perform the action require possession of an ‘ability-based concept’. Here I explain their overall account and argument in more detail and argue that their activity-relative account is mistaken.

Unlike myself (and Pavese, as I discuss in §3.3), Bengson and Moffett do not admit different senses of “knowledge-how”. They hold that statements of the form “X knows how to $\phi$” are unambiguous and univocal. Nonetheless, they hold that knowing how to $\phi$ sometimes entails the ability to $\phi$ and sometimes does not. Their argument begins with the intuition that knowing how to $\phi$ seems to entail the ability to $\phi$ for only certain activities. They include amongst such activities (which they call ‘select activities’) addition, subtraction, multiplication, conjunction elimination, disjunction introduction, and modus ponens. Knowing how to perform any of these activities, they think, requires the ability to perform them, while knowing how to perform a quintuple salchow, a complex ski stunt, how to dunk a basketball, or dance does not. They then try to explain why that should be the case.

Their explanation relies on a general connection between know-how and concept-possession, not dissimilar to the one I espoused in the previous chapter. Their account of this connection, however, relies on more detail. They argue that knowing how to $\phi$, whatever the activity may be, requires ‘reasonable mastery’ of the ‘relevant concepts’ of $\phi$-ing. As they understand this, the relevant concepts of $\phi$-ing are those concepts reasonable mastery of which

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9 Pavese (2015b) also makes use of the notion of ability-based concepts, though as we will see below, she differs from Bengson and Moffett in important ways.

10 I briefly discussed their reasons for holding this view in Chapter 2, n.3.

11 Bengson & Moffett (2007, 40); in principle, it seems that they would be willing to expand this list, but only to certain kinds of reasonably simple mental activities.

12 (Ibid., 41)
is necessary and sufficient for having a basic understanding of \( \varphi \)-ing.\(^{13}\) In the case of multiplication, for instance, they think there is one relevant concept — viz., \textit{multiplication} or \textit{times}. So reasonable mastery of that concept is supposed to be necessary and sufficient for having a basic understanding of multiplication and also necessary for knowing how to multiply. Reasonable mastery of a concept, in turn, is understood as a ‘degree’ of concept-possession. It is more than \textit{mere possession} — which they, following Burge (1990), think is quite easy to achieve — but it is less than \textit{complete mastery}. ‘Intuitively, \( x \) has reasonable mastery of the relevant concepts only if \( x \) has the ability to correctly employ those concepts in simple ways’ (Bengson & Moffett 2007, 43).

In explaining what it means to ‘be able to employ a concept in simple ways’, they appeal to their own intuitions concerning particular concepts and whether being able to employ those concepts in simple ways requires the ability to perform the activity in question. They suggest that in order to be able to employ \textit{multiplication} in simple ways, for instance, one must be able to perform simple multiplication functions — that is, one must be able to multiply in simple cases.\(^{14}\) If one cannot multiply in simple cases, or if one consistently makes errors in trying, one does not have reasonable mastery of the concept — regardless of what else one can do. \textit{Multiplication} is thus what they call ‘an ability-based concept’. A concept \( \varphi \) is an ability-based concept just in case reasonable mastery of it requires that one be able to \( \varphi \) in simple cases. They conclude that knowing how to \( \varphi \) requires the ability to \( \varphi \) if and only if the relevant concepts of \( \varphi \)-ing are ability-based concepts — thereby explaining their intuition that knowing how to \( \varphi \) requires the ability to \( \varphi \) only for select activities.

I am not opposed to the idea of ‘select activities’ — perhaps Bengson and Moffett are right that one cannot know how to perform a select activity without being able to perform it. But my intuitions differ from theirs as concerns the set of activities for which knowledge how to \( \varphi \) \textit{can} entail the ability to \( \varphi \). I think the set is not limited to those Bengson and Moffett suggest. This intuition is of course concomitant with my position on the ambiguity of “knowledge-how”. I think that the case of the centipede, for instance, provides good evidence for its being ambiguous. Bengson and Moffett argue against such a view by claiming that the “ability-to-\( \varphi \)”-implication of “knows-how-to-\( \varphi \)”-ascriptions is both cancellable and reinforceable. They point out, for instance, that each of the following statements is sensible:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Irina knows how to do a quintuple salchow, but she is unable to do one.
\end{enumerate}

\(^{13}\)(ibid., n.20)

\(^{14}\)They do not specify what counts as a simple case, but we can imagine ‘1 x 1’, ‘1 x 2’, etc.
(2) Not only does Irina know how to do a quintuple salchow, she can actually do one. In the first, the ability to do a quintuple salchow is ‘cancelled’; in the second, it is ‘reinforced’. But it seems to me that these are sensible statements even if there are different senses of “knowledge how to φ”. Indeed, there being different such senses would seem to explain the need to cancel or reinforce. As this disagreement quickly gets deep into the philosophy of language, however, I want to spend the remainder of this section arguing against Bengson and Moffett’s overall account in a different way. I want to argue that their view (at least in outline) can be extended even to non-select activities.

The first move of their argument, again, is to claim that knowing how to φ requires reasonable mastery of the relevant concepts of φ-ing. Again, in the case of multiplication, this is meant to require reasonable mastery of the concept multiplication, which is meant to require the ability to multiply in simple situations. What is reasonable mastery of the relevant concepts, for instance, of playing basketball? What are the concepts reasonable mastery of which constitute a basic understanding of playing basketball? We could, as Bengson and Moffett do with the activity of multiplication, just say that the relevant concept is playing basketball, and I think that is basically right. But given the complexity of basketball, it is perhaps more helpful to say that the relevant concepts are those concepts that constitute that more general concept, such as shooting, dribbling, staying in bounds, etc. So what is required for reasonable mastery of these concepts?

It seems to me that reasonable mastery of these concepts will sometimes entail the ability to shoot, dribble, or stay in bounds. In support of this, notice that it seems to make sense to ask agent-specific questions about possessing them – e.g., ‘When does a basketball player have the concept out of bounds?’ in contrast to ‘When does a basketball coach have the concept out of bounds?’ Why would that be? Similar to our discussion of rules above, the reason would seem to be that players and coaches (qua players and coaches) employ the concepts of their domain in characteristically different ways. Players employ the concept out of bounds, for instance, in keeping themselves in bounds, and perhaps in trying to coax opponents out of bounds. Coaches, on the other hand, employ the concept out of bounds in telling players when they have

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15 Bengson & Moffett (2007, 35)
16 The general issue of semantic and pragmatic meaning is a complicated one, but I tend to side with Wittgenstein over Grice (1989) in not drawing a sharp distinction between the two. See, e.g., Travis (1991) on this disagreement. As Travis notes, the cancellability of a claim ‘that P’ from a claim ‘that W’ would be strong evidence that W does not say that P if we also held that a string of words could only say that P if speaking them always says that P. As above, however, I do not think that “X knows how to φ” always says that X is able to φ.
gone out of bounds and in instructing them on how to avoid going out of bounds. The ability to employ this concept in these ways, in fact, would seem to be partially constitutive of their being a (reasonably competent) player and coach, respectively. And that suggests that their having a reasonable grasp of the concept (as a player and as a coach, respectively) requires such competence.

Again, this way of seeing things is natural given the view of rule-knowledge expressed above. As one can know a rule in different ways, so one can possess a concept in different ways, where these ways are constituted by distinct abilities. In the previous chapter, I relied on a tight connection between knowing the rules of $\phi$-ing and possessing the concept $\psi$-ing, saying that possessing such a concept entails and is entailed by knowing the rules. Pavese (2015b) makes much the same claim in saying that practical concepts are rules. In either case, if one can possess a rule in different ways, one can also possess a concept in different ways, such that reasonable mastery of a concept will sometimes mean possessing one ability and sometimes another.

Bengson and Moffett provide an example that tries to put a wedge between concept-possession and non-mental abilities, but I think it fails. They imagine a figure skater, Irina, who can perform salchows but who is ‘seriously mistaken’ about how to perform them, thus seriously misconceives of salchows:

She believes incorrectly that the way to perform a salchow is to take off from the front outside edge of her skate, jump in the air, spin, and land on the front inside edge of her skate. (The correct sequence is to take off from the back inside edge and land on the back outside edge of the opposite foot after one or more rotations in the air.) (Bengson & Moffett 2007, 46)

Irina can still perform salchows because she has a ‘severe neurological abnormality’, such that when she tries to perform salchows according to her mistaken conception, she instead does them in the correct way – and fails to notice any discrepancy between the two. So if a coach were to watch Irina do salchows, it seems they would say, ‘You’ve got the concept.’ But the setup of the example has it that Irina’s conception is seriously mistaken, which implies that she does not have the concept, despite her ability and despite what the coach may think. Her basic misconception precludes her, it seems, from being able to employ the concept at all.

The extent of Irina’s misconception, however, is underspecified in the example, and this gives us room to push back against Bengson and Moffett’s conclusion. The only manifestation of Irina’s misconception mentioned is that she ‘uses the misconception’ in trying to perform salchows. But it is clear enough that that alone cannot constitute her misconceiving
of salchows. For if her coach were to show her video of her salchows, for instance, and she thereby came to have the correct conception of salchows, she still ought to use the misconception in trying to perform salchows, given her neurological abnormality. Otherwise, she would start doing them incorrectly. Using a misconception and having a misconception thus come apart.

What might fill the gap between them? One essential point left unspecified in the case is whether Irina is reliably able, when she does salchows, to tell whether she has done them correctly or incorrectly. If she is able to do this, of course, she must have a reasonable conceptual grasp of salchows, since being reliably able to judge when one has done a salchow correctly or incorrectly requires a general idea of what a salchow is.

Is this ability ruled out by the fact that Irina tries to do salchows in accordance with a misconception? I think it is not, and, indeed, I think that if Irina does not have this ability, it becomes either (1) difficult to explain how she continues to do salchows correctly, or else (2) impossible to think of her as a full-blooded agent as concerns her salchows. For, in regard to (1), if she reliably misjudges whether she has done a salchow correctly, it seems she would come to do salchows incorrectly. She would begin to ‘correct’ herself when she was in fact already doing them correctly. And in regard to (2), if she merely parrots the correctness- and incorrectness-judgements of her coach – which is plausibly how she came to do salchows correctly in the first place, despite her own misconception – or if she makes no such judgements at all, she is a simulacrum of a figure-skater, not a figure skater properly speaking – not someone it makes sense to credit for her salchow jumps.

If Bengson and Moffett intend that Irina’s being seriously mistaken about salchows rules out that she can tell when she has done a salchow correctly, I agree that she lacks the kind of basic understanding of salchows required for knowing how to do salchows, at least in the way that a full-blooded figure skater does. Her ability to \( \varphi \), in that case, does not amount to skill; it is not a reliable, intelligent ability to \( \varphi \), governed by the rules of \( \varphi \)-ing. But if she does have that ability, she clearly does correctly conceive of salchows. Her salchow performances are guided by the rules of salchows, hence by a suitably correct conception of salchows. Thus, while the ability to \( \varphi \) does not entail possession of the concept \( \varphi \)-ing, it may still be the case that a certain kind of concept-possession, for all the Irina case shows, does entail the ability to
φ. So, though the only abilities ever entailed by knowledge-how on Bengson and Moffett’s view are mental abilities, they have not given us sufficient reason to think that knowledge-how would not at least sometimes entail abilities of other kinds as well.

3.3 Practical Senses

I turn next to the propositionalist intellectualists’ preferred explanation of the fact that knowing how to φ sometimes entails the ability to φ. Unlike Bengson and Moffett’s notion of an ability-based concept, the notion of a ‘practical mode of presentation’ or ‘practical sense’ was not initially devised to explain this fact. As noted above, Stanley and Williamson conceive of “practical mode of presentation” as a purely linguistic notion. One of the primary complaints against intellectualists adopting Stanley and Williamson’s view was that they had not made clear enough what a practical mode of presentation is, nor made clear its relation to ability. The most extensive development of the idea of a practical mode of presentation has recently occurred in Pavese’s ‘Practical Senses’ (2015a).

Pavese holds that knowing how to φ is knowing, for some way w, that w is a way to φ. Her aim in ‘Practical Senses’ is to explain the fact that there are various senses of “knowing how to φ” and, in particular, to explain the sense of it that entails the ability to φ. She says the following:

Suppose I look at a swimmer’s swimming, and my swimming instructor pointing to the swimmer, says to me “That is a way in which you could swim too.” I believe my instructor and we may suppose that what she said is in fact true. I may thereby come to know a true answer to the question “How could I swim?” However, in the relevant sense, I may not have come to know how to swim. If I took a swimming test, I might still fail it. If thrown in the swimming pool, I might still drown. I do not know how to swim in the relevant sense… (Pavese 2015a, 1)

Her aim in the paper is thus to explain knowing how to φ ‘in the relevant sense’. She argues that one possesses knowledge-how in this sense when the proposition known is a ‘practical proposition’ — that is, when the proposition known has as a component a ‘practical sense’.

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17 I take this treatment of the Irina example to be compatible with Carter and Czarnecki’s (2017) treatment of it. A surface-level difference is that whereas Carter and Czarnecki aim to argue that Irina lacks the ability to do a salchow, I argue just that she may lack a certain kind of ability – viz., skill.

18 See, e.g., Glick (2015).

19 It is worth noting that Pavese follows Stanley and Williamson (2001) and Stanley (2011) in taking the ‘possibility’-reading of the infinitive in know-how ascriptions as the primary one. That is why she poses the question in this passage as ‘How could I swim?’ I have argued against this position in Chapter 2, but it will not affect the following discussion.
which one grasps in grasping the relevant proposition. I will briefly describe her account in what follows, but I skip over some of the details, as they are not important for our purposes.20

Drawing on some ideas of Frege, Pavese thinks of practical senses as abstract, non-linguistic, mind-independent ‘ways of thinking’ of ways to $\varphi$ – making ‘ways to $\varphi$’ the referents of such senses.21 So, for instance, if $\varphi$-ing is “swimming” and the way to $\varphi$ in question is “by doing the breaststroke”, a relevant practical sense will be a way of thinking of doing the breaststroke and, in particular, a practical way of thinking of doing the breaststroke. Pavese’s claim is that when one thinks of the breaststroke ‘in a practical way’, one is thereby able to swim.

What is it, though, to think of the breaststroke in a practical way? What makes a practical sense practical? The first part of the answer is that a practical sense is a way of thinking of a way to $\varphi$ that involves rules or commands for doing things; Pavese says that the ‘semantic value’ of a practical sense is a rule or command.22 Crucially, however, the only rules that she admits are inferential rules, rules for moving from one ‘representation’ to another. To grasp a practical sense, she says, is to ‘come to think of how to perform a task through an inferential rule’.23 The second part of the answer is then that when one grasps a way to $\varphi$ through an inferential rule, one ‘thereby come[s] to have a certain ability – the ability to follow that rule’.24 What makes a practical sense practical, then, is the fact that its semantic value is a rule and that grasping a practical sense endows one with the ability to follow that rule.25

That grasping a practical sense ‘endows’ one with abilities can sound mysterious; but it is not all that mysterious in the end. For, first, Pavese holds that one cannot come to grasp a practical sense without possessing an underlying capacity to learn how to perform the task in question.26 For example, she holds that one cannot come to grasp a practical sense for speaking

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20 The details consist of an analogy between practical senses and computer programs. In particular, Pavese argues that action-types can be thought of on the model of functions, that ways to $\varphi$ can be thought of on the model of algorithms, and that practical senses can be thought of on the model of computer programs. I continue to footnote some relevant points of the analogy, but the problematic conclusion she draws can be seen without reference to them.

21 (ibid., 4-5)

22 (ibid., 5). Relying on the analogy with computer programs, Pavese here notes that programs are standardly understood as comprised of two ‘parts’: a program text (a concrete representation) and a semantic value, which semantic value, she says, is a rule (ibid.). In keeping with the ‘abstractness’ requirement of Fregean senses, however, she proposes to focus on semantic values of programs rather than program texts.

23 (ibid., 8)

24 (ibid., 8)

25 In essence, this is just another way of stating her view that knowledge of a rule is necessary but insufficient for knowing-how. She expresses this more explicitly in Pavese (2015b, 180-181), as I have discussed in Chapter 2.

26 (ibid., 9)
Finnish if one does not have some underlying, general capacity for language. And, second, she also admits that one will often need to be instructed in order to come to grasp a practical sense; so (at least usually) one will come to do so through some process of learning. In contrast to Dreyfus’s argument discussed in the previous chapter, however, Pavese seems to hold that being given the ‘instructions’ for φ-ing is sufficient for being able to φ. One comes to be able to φ by following those instructions — on her account, following instructions is the basis of any action.27

Though rule-following regresses are relevant here, I will not push Pavese on that particular point. The problem with Pavese’s account on which I wish to focus is that the only kind of ability with which her account is directly concerned is the ability to think or reason; it is narrowly cognitive or mental ability, rather than any kind of essentially bodily ability. This is brought out especially clearly by Pavese’s treatment of the often-discussed case of Hannah, the concert pianist who loses her arms in a car crash.28 The question generally posed in regard to Hannah is ‘After having lost her arms, does she still know how to play piano?’ But Pavese is interested in a slightly different question — viz., ‘After having lost her arms, does she still have the ability to play the piano?’ Her answer is a qualified “Yes”, which brings out just how narrow the kind of ability entailed by grasping a practical sense is:

When we think of her cognitive and mental facts, and of them only, Hannah counts as having the ability to play the piano, for her playing the piano is compossible with her cognitive and mental capacities. But when we think of facts about her that are not cognitive nor mental, such as her having just lost her arms, she does not count as having the ability to play the piano, for her playing the piano is not compossible with this larger set of facts. So, one can accept that knowledge how to φ does not entail the ability to φ simpliciter, while insisting that knowledge how to φ entails the ability to φ in a qualified sense… [viz.,] the ability to follow a rule to φ.

(Pavese 2015a, 16)

Though Pavese is attempting here to save a sense of ‘ability to φ’ as entailed by her account of grasping a practical sense, it is clear that the kind of ability she has in mind is not well-described in those terms. It is, as she glosses it at the end of this passage, rather the ability to ‘follow a rule’ to φ, but such an ability, on her understanding of it, is not necessarily the ability to φ. Even after the accident, Hannah has the ability to ‘follow a rule to play the piano’, in Pavese’s sense,

27 (ibid., 10)
but she cannot play the piano. This is of course because the relevant rules, on Pavese’s account, are all rules of reasoning. Following them only necessarily amounts to thinking or reasoning.

We could perhaps agree that after the accident, Hannah can still think of a way to play the piano, even practically, but this does not endow her with the ability to play the piano. Perhaps it is true that if she had arms, she would be able to play the piano; but she is not in fact able to play. Pavese’s suggestion is that if we consider only Hannah’s cognitive and mental abilities, we will count her as being able to play the piano. On the contrary, I think that if we consider only Hannah’s cognitive and mental abilities, we cannot consider her able to play, because we would not be considering all the features of her relevant to her playing. Someone very much like Hannah may be able to play, but she cannot.

Pavese does not show, then, that knowing how to do things like play the piano or swim entails the ability to play the piano or swim, as she seems initially to set out to do. Remember that she had hoped to explain the sense of “knowing how to swim” such that if she were to take a swimming test, she would pass and not drown. But as knowing how to φ, on her view, only ever entails the ability to φ when φ-ing is ‘following rules of reasoning’, she will not have secured herself such a sense. Like Bengson and Moffett, then, she occupies an ‘Intellectualist’ position in Ryle’s most basic sense. In the next section, I return to Ryle’s treatment of Intellectualism and provide some final reasons for rejecting that view.

3.4 On Ryle on the Abilities and Objects of Knowledge-How and Knowledge-That

Unlike in the earlier ‘Conscience in Moral Convictions’ (1940), in which we saw Ryle distinguish between two senses of knowledge-how simply be reference to distinct kinds of ability, in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ (1945) and The Concept of Mind (1949) he

29 The claim that Hannah would have the ability to play the piano if she had arms seems to me to have two possible readings. First, it could mean that if Hannah had not lost her arms, she would be able to play. That claim seems undoubtedly true, barring other accidents. Second, it could mean that if Hannah were to come to have arms again, she would, without having to re-learn how to play the piano, be able to play the piano. But it is not at all clear that this understanding of the claim would be true.

30 Admittedly, others have thought of the case of Hannah in a way similar to Pavese. Hawley (2003) gives a possible worlds interpretation of ‘abilities to φ’ such that Hannah comes out able to play the piano; for in a nearby possible world in which Hannah has arms, she succeeds at playing the piano when she tries. I think that this is unilluminating unless it is fleshed out in terms of one of the two meanings I have listed above, only one of which is obviously true, and neither of which means that Hannah, now, has the ability to play piano.

Noë (2005) also treats the case of Hannah in a similar way. He says that Hannah still has the ability to play piano but lacks the opportunity – just as she would if she lacked a piano on which to play. I think this draws the line in the wrong place. An ability is a state of an individual; and whereas a lack of arms is a state of Hannah, a lack of piano is not.
distinguishes between knowledge-how and knowledge-that in terms of two kinds of feature. The first is the kind of feature on which we focused in the previous chapter: what knowledge-how is knowledge of. The second is the kind of feature on which we have focused in this chapter: the kind of ability knowledge-how involves. In these better-known works, he understands knowledge-how as knowledge of ways, methods, or rules (in contrast to knowledge of true propositions or facts), and he understands it as essentially involving the ability to do the thing that one knows how to do (in contrast to the ability merely to say or think how to do it). In neither work does he tell us how these features are meant to be related, but it has usually been taken that the following is implied: that know-how essentially involves the ability to do what one knows how to do because it is knowledge of ways, methods, or rules and, correspondingly, that knowledge-that essentially involves the ability to say or think how to perform the activity in question because it is knowledge of true propositions or facts. It has thus been thought that what each kind of knowledge is knowledge of is the more basic of their two features.

This thought may explain why Stanley and Williamson (2001) could take themselves to be wholly discrediting Ryle’s distinction simply by showing (or taking themselves to show) that knowledge-how is a kind of ‘propositional knowledge’. They argued that statements of the form “X knows that p” can express precisely what statements of the form “X knows how to φ” express and, hence, that knowledge-how is a species of propositional knowledge. If they were right (and if what knowledge-how is knowledge of is the more basic feature), it follows that knowledge how to φ does not entail the ability to φ. It would also follow that neither of the features Ryle thought were distinctive of knowledge-how in fact are.

31 Some contest that one or the other of these ways of drawing the distinction is in fact Ryle’s. Thus, for instance, while some have attributed to him the view that the ability to φ is sufficient for knowing how to φ (e.g., Glick (2012) and Carter & Pritchard (2015)), others have argued that, on Ryle’s account, the ability to φ is not even necessary for knowing how to φ. (See, e.g., Hornsby (2011, 82) and Small (2016, 70-71)). This latter claim is given support by the fact that Ryle describes knowledge-how (and, indeed, knowledge in general) as a ‘multi-track’ disposition, as when he says the following:

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

This passage, however, is ambiguous as to the point Hornsby and Small wish to make. It is compatible both with the view that knowing how to φ essentially involves the ability to φ and with the view that it does not. I take it that though Ryle is interested in other abilities as well, he only (in the later papers) speaks of knowing how to φ as entailing the ability to φ.

32 The position I have called ‘anti-intellectualism’ in the previous chapter is of course an exception.
In ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’, Ryle actually endorses Stanley and Williamson’s kind of linguistic argument, just not its specific content. One of his own arguments against the view that knowing-how is a species of knowing-that takes essentially the same form:

In respect of many practices, like fishing, cooking and reasoning, we can extract principles from their applications by people who know how to fish, cook and reason. But when we try to express these principles we find that they cannot easily be put in the indicative mood. They fall automatically into the imperative mood. Hence comes the awkwardness for the intellectualist theories of stating what are the truths or facts which we acknowledge when we acknowledge a rule or maxim. We cannot call an imperative a truth or falsehood. (Ryle 1945a, 12)

Ryle suggests here that we cannot ‘easily’ express the principles or rules of an activity as truths or facts (that is, in the indicative mood), and he suggests that this makes the view that knowing-how is a species of knowing-that an ‘awkward’ one. This at least gives credence to Stanley and Williamson’s linguistic argument as an argument against Ryle.

It is worth remembering, however, that what Ryle calls ‘the Intellectualist legend’ is not first and foremost the view that statements of the form “X knows that p” can be substituted for statements of the form “X knows how to φ”. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Intellectualist legend is rather the view that human intelligence essentially amounts to thinking. Against this view, Ryle is mainly concerned to argue that a person’s intelligence is ‘as directly exhibited in some of his doings as it is in some of his thinking’. The linguistic test thus furthers his cause only if there is a direct connection between the fact of a bit of knowledge being ascribable in propositional form and the fact of thinking being the only direct way of exhibiting that knowledge. But that there is such a connection is, at the very least, not obvious.

This would seem to give us two potential tests for a bit of knowledge being ‘propositional’. We have, on the one hand, the Stanley and Williamson claim that a bit of knowledge is propositional insofar as it can be ascribed with a “that”-clause and, on the other, the basic Rylean claim (of 1945 and 1949) that a bit of knowledge is propositional insofar as the only way to directly exhibit it is by thinking a thought that has the same content as what one knows. If these kinds of propositionality come apart, they are tests for different features (both of which we happen to call ‘propositionality’); while if they do not come apart, they are tests for the same feature.

In these terms, Ryle’s position (in 1945 and 1949) is that they are tests for the same feature. But if push had come to shove, it’s fairly clear that he would have abandoned the

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33 Ryle (1945a, 5)
linguistic test. In those works, again, his most basic target is the Intellectualist legend, the view that intelligence directly manifests only in thinking. He is thus committed to understanding ‘knowledge-that’ most basically in terms of an agent’s possessing the ability to think. He clearly understands knowledge-how – viz., rule-knowledge – in contrast to this. We saw in Chapter 1 that he claims of rules that they ‘must live before they can be stuffed’ (1945a, 11), meaning that they must be implicit in action before being explicit in thought or talk. This implies that rule-knowledge is most basically connected to the ability to do what the rule says to do, rather than to think what it says to do.

As this is the most basic way in which Ryle understands propositional knowledge and rule-knowledge, however, it’s misleading to say that the basic feature of his distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is what each kind of knowledge is knowledge of. For in understanding rule-knowledge and propositional knowledge themselves in terms of distinct kinds of ability, he makes ability at least as basic to both. And, again, as his most explicit aim in discussing knowledge-how and knowledge-that would straightforwardly fail without the difference in abilities, if either feature of knowledge-how and knowledge-that was to be the more basic, it would clearly be the kind of ability each involves.

One important implication is that admitting that knowledge-how is a species of ‘propositional knowledge’ may or may not commit one to thinking that knowledge-how directly manifests only in thinking (i.e., being an intellectualist may or may not make one an Intellectualist). For one could admit that statements of the form “X knows that φ” can be substituted for statements of the form “X knows how to φ” (hence, admit that know-how is propositional in one sense) while denying that such knowledge directly manifests only in thinking (hence, denying that it is propositional in another sense). When I construed declarative “ought”-statements as expressions of rules in the previous chapter and said that knowing-how is knowing rules, I was admitting that knowledge-how is a species of propositional knowledge in the first sense but not in the second sense. What is expressed by an ‘ought’-statement of course can be thought, but it can also (and instead) be enacted, as discussed at the end of the previous chapter.

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34 Such a view of propositional knowledge is made more plausible if one thinks of propositions as essentially objects of thought, which Ryle seems (at times) to do. See, e.g., his ‘Are There Propositions?’ (1930) and ‘Philosophical Arguments’ (1945b). As mentioned above, an exception is his ‘Conscience and Moral Convictions’ (1940).

35 One could of course disagree with what Ryle seems to mean by this and reinterpret it. Perhaps a rule must live in someone before it can be stuffed, but it needn’t live in me before I am able to stuff it. Thus, I needn’t be able to do what a rule says to do before knowing it, at least in one sense of knowing it.

36 Kremer (2016) offers a compatible view of Ryle on knowledge generally.
The second point I wish to draw is that one’s position on the propositionality of know-how has direct implications for one’s position on the relation between knowing how to φ and possessing the ability to φ. In particular, if one holds that know-how is propositional in that it directly manifests only in thinking how to φ, knowing how to φ (for non-thinking acts) will only indirectly manifest in φ-ing. In that case, a lot will have to go right between one’s thinking how to φ and one’s φ-ing – making the relation between knowing how to φ and such ability a non-logical one, rather than a matter of entailment. By contrast, if knowing how to φ is ever to entail such ability (for non-thinking acts), it must sometimes directly manifest in φ-ing.

We have seen that Bengson, Moffett, and Pavese subscribe to views on which knowing how to φ is propositional in both of the above senses and, hence, subscribe to views on which knowing how to φ directly manifests in φ-ing only when ‘φ-ing’ is a thinking operation. They propose not merely intellectualist views, then, but Intellectualist ones. The result is that none can explain what I have taken from the start as a desideratum for a proper account of knowledge-how – viz., the ability to explain the distinct senses of “knowing how to run” apparent in the case of the centipede.

But, further, and more importantly, each of these views is committed to a stunted view of human action. Properly speaking, neither can say that I run – rather, I think, and my thinking (if all goes well) results in running. Indeed, on these accounts, it would seem that thinking is all that I really do. They thus take us back to something like the Cartesian view of human being with which we began. I think, with Ryle, that we ought to resist that view and the more particular view of knowledge-how that it entails. In this and the previous chapter, I have tried to provide a way of doing that.

§3.5 Conclusion

The primary conclusion of this and the previous chapter is that knowledge-how sometimes amounts to skill. I have first argued that knowledge-how is well-understood in terms of knowledge of rules and then argued that such a view fits well with the view that knowing how to do a thing sometimes entails the ability to do it and sometimes does not. Just as ‘knowing a rule’ sometimes in part means being able to act in accordance with it, so ‘knowing how to φ’ sometimes in part means being able to φ. Indeed, knowing how to do a thing, on the account I have offered, sometimes is possessing a reliable, intelligent ability to do it – or a skill.
At the same time, I have attempted to provide some clarity concerning how the key positions in the debate hang together. I have argued that there is substantially less disagreement than there can seem, especially concerning the issue of what knowledge-how is knowledge of; though I have also suggested that the main disagreement which Ryle had as a target remains. This is the disagreement over whether intelligence can be directly manifested only in thinking or also in other kinds of doing. We have seen that the most prominent intellectualists in the current debate are also ‘Intellectualists’ in this Rylean sense. In arguing that “knowing how to \( \phi \)” sometimes means ‘skill at \( \phi \)-ing’ even for non-mental abilities, I have sided with Ryle in denying Intellectualism, though not intellectualism. In this respect, the view I have proposed saves the key components of what he understood as ‘knowing-how’.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we return to another of the main questions which we have seen at the base of Ryle’s interest in know-how: the question of whether virtue is itself a kind of know-how. If “know-how” did not refer (at least sometimes) to a distinctive kind of knowledge (viz., skill), this question would have been an uninteresting one. As it stands, however, we not only have good reason to think that it is an interesting question but also a basis on which to think about it. In Chapter 4, I add to this by considering various of the most common objections to the idea that virtue is a kind of skill, from Aristotle to the present. I do so, however, while arguing for a reinterpretation of that idea. As we will see, this brings us rather close to Ryle’s late idea that virtue is not a kind of skill because virtue requires care. In Chapter 5, however, I return to this idea and question whether it really does keep virtue from being a kind of skill – asking, in particular, whether care (or, as I will come to prefer, ‘commitment’) is not itself a kind of skill.
Chapter 4
The Importance of Roles in the Skill Analogy

I swear you absolutely never stop talking about shoemakers and cleaners and cooks and doctors!
As though our conversation were about them!
– Callicles (Gorgias 491a)

4.0 Introduction

Alongside the renewed interest in virtue ethics in the past half-century has come a renewed and growing interest in the skill analogy, the ancient Greek idea that ethical virtue is well-understood on the model of practical skills.1 Almost all ancient philosophers rely on the skill analogy in discussing virtue. So in returning to virtue, it makes good sense that we would, too.

The ancient philosophers from whom we’ve taken the analogy, however, rely on it to differing degrees, thus also differing in the extent to which they treat it as a mere analogy. The early Platonic dialogues, for one, are often understood as extended arguments for the idea that virtue is a skill. In the Gorgias, for instance, Callicles teases Socrates for always going on about cobblers, fullers, cooks, and doctors, ‘as though our conversation were about them’ (491a). The implication is often taken to be that Socrates holds, like the later Stoics, that the analogy

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1 The analogy is also found in at least ancient Chinese and Roman philosophy. See, e.g., Stalnaker (2010), Yao (2012), and Klein (2014) on these other sources.
is no mere analogy. Aristotle, on the other hand, despite making positive use of the analogy in developing his own account of virtue, ultimately treats it as merely helpful for beginning to think about virtue. Virtue is not a skill, he says, but we do well to start thinking of it on that model. The result is that the skill analogy takes two general forms in the ancient debate, as two positive positions on the relation between skill and virtue. The first is that virtue is sufficiently analogous to skill to be a skill – hence, that the analogy is no mere analogy. The second is that virtue is analogous to skill but is insufficiently analogous to be a skill – hence, that the analogy is a mere analogy. In this respect, the contemporary debate looks much like the ancient one. While some philosophers hold that virtue is a skill, others hold that it is merely like skill. And, further, that about which the ancients agree, contemporary philosophers largely do, too. As we have seen in the Introduction, they agree that both skill and virtue involve practical knowledge, that both are to some degree teachable, and that acquiring each requires practice or training.

Arguments purporting to show that the analogy is a mere analogy, however, seem to have multiplied. Four of Aristotle’s objections to the idea that virtue is a skill remain and are often repeated. These are as follows:

**The Action/Production Objection:** The virtuous person acts virtuously for its own sake, whereas the skilled person acts skillfully for what it produces.

**The Firm Character Objection:** The virtuous person acts from a firm and unchanging character, whereas the skilled person does not.

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2 Irwin (1995) and Nussbaum (2001) contain classic expositions of this view of the early dialogues. For a dissenting voice, see Roochnik (1990). Roochnik interprets Socrates as making points in both the early and middle dialogues that suggest an important disanalogy with skill – viz., that the good practitioner of a skill, unlike the virtuous person, is best-suited to use it for bad. (See, e.g., *Laches* 195e and *Republic* 333e.) This point is related to what I below call the ‘Capacity/Disposition Objection’ and the ‘No-Bad-Ends Objection’. *Hippias Minor* is also relevant to this discussion. There, Socrates presents an argument concerning runners in a race, related to what I below call the ‘Voluntary Mistakes Objection’.

3 Bloomfield (2001, 59) and Annas (2003, 16-17) claim that amongst the ancient Greeks, only Aristotle held that the analogy is a mere analogy.

4 Annas (1995), Swartwood (2013), and Stichter (2016), for instance, fall into the former camp. Footnotes 6-12, below, list those who fall into the latter. Still others will not find the analogy useful enough to be worth special emphasis.

5 As we have seen, Ryle (1972) argues that such teachability is more properly understood as learnability. I intend to include his “learnable” in the “teachable” here.

6 Apart from Aristotle (e.g., NE 1105a28-35, 1140a1-18), at least Broadie (1991, 83), Zagzebski (1996, 113), and Klein (2014) make this objection. Annas (1995, 230) and (2011) admits the content of this objection but thinks it inconsequential for the skill analogy. As we will see, this objection also entails those claiming that one’s motivation matters for virtue but not for skill, as in Hacker-Wright (2015).

The Voluntary Mistakes Objection: The virtuous person’s virtue is impugned by voluntary mistakes, whereas the skilled person’s skill is not.  

The Practical Wisdom Objection: Virtue requires practical wisdom, whereas skill does not.  

In addition to these, however, contemporary philosophers often note at least three other, *prima facie* distinct objections:  

The Capacity/Disposition Objection: Virtue is a kind of disposition to act well, whereas skill is a mere capacity to act well.  

The No-Vice-Analogue Objection: Virtue has *vice* as its contrary, whereas skill has only *lack of skill*, which is not analogous to vice.  

The No-Bad-Ends Objection: Virtue cannot be used toward bad ends, whereas skill can be.  

I will further explain these objections later in the essay, but I will be arguing that each misses the mark. Each fails to give us good reason to think that the skill analogy is a mere analogy. As I will be arguing, however, this is not because any of the objections is factually incorrect about skill or virtue. Each misses the mark, rather, because each embodies a basic misunderstanding of the skill analogy.  

What is the misunderstanding? Roughly, it is to think that the analogy aims to understand virtuous human beings on the model of merely *skilled* individuals – individuals merely good (or very good) at making shoes, treating illnesses, or playing tennis, for instance – when it rather aims to understand them on the model of good occupants of skill-involving

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8 Apart from Aristotle (*NE* 1140a21-24), Foot (2002, 8) is most famous for making this objection. See also Ryle (1972, 438), Zagzebski (1996, 107) and Lott (2014, 390ff.).  

9 Apart from Aristotle (e.g., *NE* 1097a5-8, 1140a27-31, 1140b5-6), Wallace (1978, 43), Putman (1997, 303), and Hacker-Wright (2015) make this objection. The content is agreed with as well by at least Stichter (2011, 84ff.) and (2016, 446ff.), but he thinks it inconsequential for the skill analogy. (See footnotes 15 and 50 on Stichter’s treatment of it.)  

10 Rees & Webber (2014) most explicitly make the objection in these terms, pointing to Ryle (1972) as inspiration. Zagzebski (1996, 107), Watson (2004), and Hacker-Wright (2015) seem to agree with the content. Related is Wallace (1978, 44ff.) and Zagzebski’s (1996, 108) claim that skill is inherently difficult, whereas virtue is not. (Aristotle (*NE* 1105a9-10) claims that *both* skill and virtue are inherently difficult. Wallace (ibid.) attempts to clarify what he takes to be the distinctive difficulty of each.)  


12 See Wallace (1978, 43), Putman (1997, 303), Stalnaker (2010, 408). Given Plato’s mention of a similar objection (see n.2), this is perhaps more accurately understood as an ancient objection. As it is *prima facie* not one of Aristotle’s, however, I list it here.  

13 Other common objections are the Expertise Objection (that there are experts in the skills but not in virtue) and the Memory Objection (that while skills can be forgotten, virtue cannot be). The latter, while inspired by the Firm Character Objection (see, again, Ryle (1958)), is distinct from it. I will not be concerned with either of these objections here, though I do return to the latter in Chapter 5.
roles – individuals, that is, such as good cobblers, doctors, and tennis players. What follows is an effort to show that this is indeed a misunderstanding, to substantiate the distinction on which it relies, and to argue that correcting for it enables us to respond to each of the above objections – thus giving us good reason to think that being a virtuous human being is being a good occupant of skill-involving role.

The chapter goes as follows: In §4.1, I discuss two recent defences of the skill analogy by two of its principal contemporary proponents: Julia Annas and Matt Stichter. As I will argue, each is, like myself, committed to saying that the above objections embody a basic misunderstanding of the analogy. But I will be arguing that neither proposal can be correct; for each defends the analogy by attributing a feature to practical skill that it in fact lacks. The two proposals do lead us, however, to what I will argue is the correct view of the analogy, relying on the distinction between ‘skill-possession’ and ‘skill-role occupancy’. In §4.2, I develop this distinction. In §4.3, I point to a similar notion in the Nicomachean Ethics. And in §4.4, we return to the above seven objections to show that the analogy withstands each of them, once understood in terms of good skill-role occupants.

4.1 Two Proposals for How the Skill Analogy Gets Misunderstood

4.1.1 Annas’s Proposal

In Intelligent Virtue (2011), Julia Annas argues that virtue is importantly like skill along two main lines. She says, ‘We find the important similarity of virtue to skill in skills where two things are united: the need to learn and the drive to aspire’ (Annas 2011, 16). As noted above, it is already widely accepted that both skill and virtue require learning (i.e., teaching or training), so we can focus here on ‘the drive to aspire’.

In beginning to do so, we should note that in the above quotation we already see the fundamental way in which Annas’s understanding of the skill analogy differs from those who make the objections of the previous section. The need to learn and the drive to aspire, she

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14 Watson (2004, 287) makes a similar distinction: ‘One can be “good at” playing tennis without being overall a good tennis player. A good tennis player, overall, possesses not only a high level of skill but, among other things, a commitment to the game, a responsibility to its distinctive demands. (In this way, “good tennis player” functions rather like “good human being”.)’ As we will discuss below, Stichter (2016) attempts to use this distinction within the skill analogy, but I believe he misuses it.

15 Note that one can be a “proponent” of the analogy in this sense while thinking that it is a mere analogy. As I discuss her below, Annas defends the view merely that virtue is analogous in important respects to skill (or, rather, some skills). Stichter does likewise, admitting the content of what I call the Practical Wisdom Objection, though he thinks that this still allows us to say that virtue is a skill. (Again, see n.50 on this latter point.)
implies, need be united in only some skills for virtue to be analogous to skill. And she makes clear in the ensuing discussion that this is because only some skills require the drive to aspire. The objections that we listed above, on the contrary, concern features purportedly shared by all skills – they say, ‘Skill is a capacity, not a disposition’, ‘Skill is concerned with production, not action’, etc. Each of these objections, that is, assumes that virtue (qua virtue) has some feature $X$ that every skill (qua skill) lacks. Annas is thus committed to saying that these objections embody a misunderstanding of the analogy: the analogy does not require that skills in general align with virtue in respect to a given feature; it requires merely that some do.

I will be making use of a similar point in my own positive proposal. But in evaluating Annas’s proposal, we should notice that she takes this point to be plausible because she takes it that only some skills require the drive to aspire, in particular. We can thus evaluate her overall proposal for how the skill analogy gets misunderstood by asking whether the drive to aspire is in fact required for the possession of some skills.

What is the drive to aspire? Annas describes it as constituted by three interrelated sub-drives, which she says must be present from the start in learning the relevant kinds of skill: the drive to understand, the drive to self-direct, and the drive to improve.16 The drive to understand is a drive to grasp why a skill is exercised in such-and-such a way, rather than merely that it is exercised in that way – so, for instance, it is a drive to grasp not only that one builds buildings in ways $x$, $y$, and $z$ but also why. Annas contrasts performances done understandingly with performances done by mere routine or parroting. And this naturally connects the drive to understand with the second sub-drive, the drive to self-direct. The drive to self-direct is a drive to do things according to one’s own understanding – it is a drive to be self-directing in one’s exercise of a skill. And lastly, the drive to improve is, as it sounds, the drive to get better and better in one’s exercise of the skill.

Here we can ask, though, whether the possession of some skills really does require the drive to aspire. The sub-drives which constitute the drive to aspire do seem necessary for acquiring skill – and in the case of the drive to understand and the drive to self-direct, that is all Annas claims. But the drive to improve, in particular, is meant also to be constitutive of the skills with which she is concerned, meaning she thinks that anyone who lacks that drive also lacks the skills in question. She recognizes that this is a very demanding requirement of a skill, but she tries to pre-empt any worry that it is too demanding by saying that if a skill does not require

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16 Annas (2011, 17-18)
the drive to improve, it is simply not the kind of skill that could be analogous to virtue. Being virtuous, she thinks, does require the drive to improve, so any skill that is to be like virtue must also require that drive.\textsuperscript{17}

But is the drive to improve constitutive of any skill? In considering this question, we might run through various skills of which Annas claims it is – she mentions building, playing piano, and tennis, amongst others. Is one skilled at these things only if one is driven to become better at them? Annas says ‘Yes’, but it’s difficult to see why this should be the case. For it seems that one possible situation in which one could be driven to improve a skill is the situation in which one already possesses it. For instance, it makes good sense to say that so-and-so is even an expert at building and that they are driven continually to improve. It makes good sense as well to say that so-and-so is the best at building in the world but is no longer driven to improve. In either case it seems that the person’s expertise does not on its own entail that they are driven to improve. Such a drive is independent of their skill. If this is correct, it follows that lacking the drive to improve a skill does nothing to show that one presently lacks it. And in that case, neither the drive to improve nor the drive to aspire more generally is a necessary constituent of any skill.\textsuperscript{18}

Before moving on to the second proposal for how the skill analogy gets misunderstood, however, it will be useful to consider why Annas might be tempted to think that the drive to improve is constitutive of (rather than merely necessary for acquiring or maintaining) some skills. Part of the answer would seem to be that she thinks that some skills (but not others) can continually be improved. For instance, she mentions shoelace-tying as a skill that does not require the drive to aspire, and it is at least plausible that shoelace-tying does not allow for continual improvement. Building, playing piano, and tennis, on the other hand, plausibly do. From the fact that a skill allows for continual improvement, however, it does not follow that possessing the skill requires that one be driven, continually, to improve it. This answer on its own, then, cannot explain why Annas thinks that some skills (but not others) require the drive to improve.

A more enlightening answer might involve a thought that can seem to be in the background of Annas’s discussion: She sometimes talks as if the drive to aspire is a possible feature of skills themselves. As we have just seen, she attaches the drive to aspire to the skills of building, piano-playing, and tennis, for instance, but not shoelace-tying, saying that ‘we do

\textsuperscript{17} Annas (2011, 19)
\textsuperscript{18} Irwin (2013, 551) argues similarly in his review of Intelligent Virtue.
not demand aspiration to improve in tying our shoelaces…”¹⁹ This may just be a loose way of talking, but it seems potentially distortive. For drives are features of people, not skills themselves. People are driven (or not driven) to improve their skills. When we say that we do not demand aspiration to improve in shoelace-tying, what we mean is that we do not demand of people that they continually be driven to improve in tying their shoelaces, not that we do not demand such a drive simply for the possession of that skill. Yet Annas can seem to attach this kind of demand (or, alternatively, lack of demand) to skills themselves.

If this is what she has in mind, of course, that would explain her view that the drive to aspire is a necessary condition for the possession of some skills but not others. But if we rather accept that the drive to improve is a possible feature of people rather than skills, as I think we should, it seems that there is no pressure to think it demanded of either all people or none in regard to a given skill. We might instead think it demanded of some people and not others. For instance, while it is perhaps a demand on human beings that they be driven continually to improve in respect to virtue, or on doctors that they be driven continually to improve in medicine, the former is clearly not demanded of non-humans, nor the latter of non-doctors. In that case, Annas would seem better off arguing that the virtuous human being is analogous to the skilled individual who is driven to improve and of whom that drive is properly demanded. It will not be my aim in what follows to argue for this particular view, but I do think that the account of good skill-role occupancy that I offer below could suit Annas’s purposes well.²⁰ Before offering that account, however, I turn to the second proposal for how the skill analogy gets misunderstood, as it provides a natural entry point to my own.

4.1.2 Stichter’s Proposal

In his paper ‘Practical Skill and Practical Wisdom in Virtue’ (2016), Matt Stichter is directly concerned to respond to some of the seven objections we mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In particular, he focuses on the Capacity/Disposition Objection, the Voluntary Mistakes Objection, and (an objection closely related to) the Action/Production Objection.²¹ In discussing his proposal for how the skill analogy gets misunderstood, I will

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¹⁹ Annas (2011, 18 n.3)
²⁰ It is worth noting that Annas (2002) does discuss the importance of roles for virtue generally (following Bradley (1927)), but she does not connect this idea with the skill analogy in particular; and I think it would be overly charitable to read such a connection into Intelligent Virtue.
²¹ He discusses a worry akin to the Action/Production Objection in the section entitled ‘Acting for Some Other End’ (440).
focus on his treatment of the Capacity/Disposition Objection. This is the objection that whereas virtue is a disposition to act well, skill is a mere capacity to do so. The nature of the distinction between dispositions and capacities (or abilities) is a controversial one, but the point of the objection can be understood fairly simply as follows. In saying that virtue is a disposition to act well, what is meant is that the virtuous agent by and large does act well and, hence, is sufficiently motivated to act well. In saying that skill is a mere capacity to act well, on the other hand, what is meant is that the skilled agent merely can act well. They will act well as concerns their particular skill when sufficiently motivated; but they needn’t be sufficiently motivated. Stichter has two separate proposals for responding to this objection. The first, however, runs into a problem similar to the one faced by Annas: he mistakes a condition necessary to acquire or maintain skill for a condition constitutive of skill. I thus discuss only his second proposal.

According to Stichter, the Capacity/Disposition Objection is the result of our tendency to evaluate performances rather than performers. For whereas performances are evaluable only in terms of standards of performance (i.e., in terms of how much skill the performance exhibits), performers, he thinks, are also evaluable in terms of their commitment to the practice of which the skill is a part. So, for instance, he takes it that any individual who is playing tennis is evaluable not only in terms of how well they play but also in terms of their commitment to tennis, and he thinks the same of anyone performing surgery and their commitment to medicine. To be committed to a practice, he says, is to be responsive to its distinctive demands, to be motivated to act in accordance with those demands. To be skilled at and committed to a practice, then, is to be disposed to act well concerning that practice. It is this basis on which he thinks the Capacity/Disposition Objection, as well as the other objections just mentioned, miss the mark.

In beginning to evaluate this proposal, we first need to correct for a dialectical oversight, an oversight which is well-conveyed in terms of a worry proponents of the Capacity/Disposition Objection are likely to have concerning Stichter’s proposal. The worry is that his proposal considers only performers, and the Capacity/Disposition Objection takes it for granted that one can be skilled and not perform. Skill is, according to that objection, a mere

22 The condition Stichter invokes is a certain quantity and quality of practice. He argues that, given the necessity of practice for acquiring and maintaining skill, skill at φ-ing requires a disposition to φ. Wolff (2008, 326) proposes the same in response to much the same objections.

23 Wolff (2008, 325) again makes a similar point.

24 I take it that practices are domains or fields of activity. See also below and n.31.

25 Stichter (2016, 443)
capacity. If Stichter is to count as responding to the Capacity/Disposition Objection, then, he also needs to account for skilled non-performers. He must be willing to say that skilled non-performers, too, are evaluable in terms of their commitment to the practice concomitant with their skill. I will assume in what follows that he is willing to say that.

Even if we amend the scope of evaluation from “all performers” to “all skilled individuals”, however, his proposal faces a second problem. For even if all skilled individuals are evaluable in terms of their commitment to the practice concomitant with their skill, that does not entail that they are in fact committed to it. One can be evaluable in terms of commitment but be negatively evaluated – hence, be uncommitted. The problem, then, is that even if all skilled individuals are evaluable in terms of their commitment to a practice, that does not entail that all skilled individuals will be motivated to act in accordance with the demands of the practice. Even if Stichter is correct that all skilled individuals are evaluable in terms of their commitment to the practice concomitant with their skill, then, his overall proposal would not show that all skilled individuals (merely qua skilled) are disposed to act well as concerns the practice concomitant to their skill. As a result, he would also not show that skill itself is analogous to virtue in being a disposition to act well.

Now, as the analogy is usually understood, this would make for a failed defence of it. But I will be arguing briefly that it is rather the beginning of a successful defence, once the analogy is properly understood. Stichter, as I understand him, is tacitly committed to the view that the skill analogy relies on a feature of skilled individuals additional to their skill itself – viz., commitment. And recognising that, I think, is essential to understanding the skill analogy correctly.

Before developing this view, however, we need to mention a final difficulty with Stichter’s proposal. He is committed to saying that proponents of the Capacity/Disposition Objection have misunderstood the analogy in two ways, but only one of these is actually a misunderstanding. First, he is tacitly committed (as I have just suggested) to saying that whereas the skill analogy is usually thought to concern only the skilled individual’s skill, it in fact also concerns their commitment to a practice. Again, I think that is correct. The remaining difficulty lies in a second misunderstanding, which we saw him suggest is responsible for the first: He claims that proponents of the Capacity/Disposition Objection have failed to notice that all skilled individuals are evaluable in terms of their commitment to the practice
concomitant with their skill, in that they are criticisable if they are not so-committed. But this is not true. On its own, possessing a skill does not entail that one is evaluable in terms of one’s commitment to the corresponding practice. So this second purported misunderstanding does not constitute an actual misunderstanding.

The examples of skill-possession that Stichter offers can tempt us to think that possessing a skill does render one evaluable in terms of one’s commitment to the corresponding practice. But that is because his examples happen to concern kinds of skilled individuals who plausibly are so-evaluable. He considers, for instance, a skilled emergency room doctor who refuses to perform surgery on a needy patient, saying that such an individual is a bad doctor for lacking commitment to the demands of medicine. He is certainly right in this case; but being a doctor is not just a matter of possessing skill at doing doctorly things. Retired doctors, for instance, can possess such skill, but they are generally not evaluable in terms of their commitment to medicine. So it is not merely their skill that makes them so-evaluable. Similar to Annas, then, Stichter requires a distinction between individuals to whom the demands of a practice apply and those to whom they do not. This is the kind of distinction that I will be developing in what follows, in distinguishing between mere skill-posseors and skill-role occupants.

4.2 Skills, Skill-Roles, and Good Skill-Role Occupants

That virtue ethics in general is comfortable with the notion of a ‘role’ should be obvious from the importance it sometimes places on ‘role models’. A key way in which the not-yet-virtuous individual is supposed to become virtuous (learn how to live) is by having and emulating role models (those who are taken to know how to live). Even so, if we do not have a firm grasp of what a role is, that would make good sense. Contemporary Western life and society are perhaps less explicitly structured around our roles than they once were. Nonetheless, I take it that we do still occupy roles and that we do still have a basic grasp on the notion of a role. We know what it is to be a parent, a citizen, or a carpenter, for instance, also a cobbler, doctor, or tennis player. And as at least some of these roles properly involve

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26 (ibid., 442-443)  
27 This suggests (pace Hardimon (1994, 334)) that ‘human being’ is a role, and that life is the practice it concerns.  
28 This is a theme in MacIntyre (1981). See Frede (2013) for a nice summary of MacIntyre’s view here; and see Lutz (2004) for a more in-depth treatment.
skill, we should also have a basic grasp on the notion of a skill-role. In the present section, I aim to make that notion more explicit and to defend my understanding of being a good skill-role occupant against an important objection. It is this notion of being a good skill-role occupant that I take to be essential to a correct understanding of the skill analogy. In §4.3, I turn to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* to argue that the “practitioners of skill” (τεχνίτες) whom he discusses in making positive use of the skill analogy are themselves not mere skill-possessioners but, rather, much like good occupants of skill-roles. In §4.4, I then return to the seven objections with which we began.

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that the distinction between mere skill-possession and skill-role occupancy is an intuitive one by reference to the difference between possessing practical skill at making shoes, treating illnesses, or playing tennis, for instance, and being a cobbler, doctor, or tennis player. Roughly, while the former are kinds of practical ability, the latter are recognized *positions* that properly require possession of the concomitant practical skill. In what follows, I want to further unpack this latter notion by reference to three core features of good skill-role occupants, in contrast to those of mere skill-possessioners.

First, in saying that skill-roles ‘properly require’ the concomitant practical skill, I mean just that occupants of a given skill-role are normatively expected to possess the concomitant skill and that they reliably fulfil their role only if they do possess it. There may be doctors without medical skill and tennis players without tennis skill, for instance, but they will be bad doctors and bad tennis players. If they do succeed in their activities, their doing so will be in an important sense accidental. Thus, while simply occupying a skill-role does not entail possession of the concomitant practical skill, being a good occupant of such a role does. Skill-possession, then, is the first of the three features of a good skill-role occupant. Perhaps rather obviously, it is the only feature shared with the mere skill-possessioner.

Next, to occupy a ‘position’ in the sense relevant to occupying a skill-role is to serve some function in a practice. This needn’t mean being employed in an official capacity or having a profession. It simply means having a task to carry out ongoingly, something for which one

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29 I take it that all of the aforementioned roles require skill. If one has a more specific notion of ‘skill’, however, one may wish to think of only some of them as skill-roles.

30 Here I talk about roles as ‘recognized’ because recognized roles are the paradigmatic kind. A full account of roles, however, should leave room for new or at least significantly reconceived roles, which we would not immediately recognize.
is responsible in a discipline, domain, or field of activity.\(^{31}\) It means having a task one \textit{ought} to perform, as an occupant of that role.\(^{32}\) So, since a tennis player’s function (\textit{qua} occupant of that role) is to play tennis, tennis players ought to play tennis. Since a doctor’s is to see and treat patients, doctors ought to see and treat patients. And since a cobbler’s is to make shoes, cobbler’s ought to make shoes.\(^{33}\) And if a role-occupant regularly fails to fulfil their function appropriately – both in appropriate ways and at appropriate times – they are a bad occupant of the relevant role. Occupying such a position, then, and reliably fulfilling it, is the second of three features that sets the good skill-role occupant apart from the mere skill-possessor.

Some philosophers, in focusing specifically on ‘social roles’ (such as parent, teacher, doctor, etc.), have understood the demands on role-occupants as a kind of moral demand.\(^{34}\) But clearly not all role-demands are moral demands. The demand on a tennis player to play tennis, for instance, will in all but the oddest cases \textit{not} be a moral demand. As a general characterization of role-demands, then, this understanding clearly does not work. Rather, since a role is a position within a practice, whose function is a matter of its position in the practice, it is rather more plausible that role-demands in general are demands of the practice of which the role is a part. We saw earlier that this is the language Stichter uses in talking of ‘the demands of the practice’ concomitant with an individual’s skill; and it seems the right language. The demand on a tennis player to play tennis and play in way \(w\) is a demand of tennis and a result of their particular position in the practice; the demand on a doctor to do such-and-such for patient \(x\) with ailment \(y\) is similarly a demand of medicine; and the demand on a cobbler to make shoes and do so in way \(z\) is a demand of cobblerly. Some of these may then \textit{also} be characterised as being of moral concern, but as the role-occupant is subject to their specific

\(^{31}\) I intend here to be accepting Putman’s (1997) criticism of MacIntyre’s notion of a ‘practice’ as being ‘intellectually biased’. Bricklaying, on my understanding, can be just as much a discipline or field of activity as architecture. One is a bricklayer if one has bricklaying as one’s ongoing task.

\(^{32}\) This point is admittedly controversial. Some think that there is no obvious connection between functions (nor virtue more specifically) and such normative statuses. If one agrees, one can imagine demands, here, as matters of non-deontic evaulability. The crucial point is just that an individual with a function is evaluable in a sense that goes beyond mere measuring. I can measure a non-doctor by the standards of a doctor, but there is an important sense in which that measure is an inappropriate measure for the non-doctor. (See n.44 on a related point.)

\(^{33}\) MacIntyre (1981, 54ff.) makes a similar point, following A.N. Prior. So do Haugeland (1998b) and Korsgaard (2009) in discussing what they call ‘constitutive standards’. As Hardimon (1994, 336) and Dworkin (1986, 45ff.) note, roles are ‘interpretative’ in that we can reasonably disagree about their more specific duties, but I take it that this does not apply to their most general duties. I will not discuss here what might ground such duties, but see, e.g., Sciaraffa (2009), Stern (2012, 161ff.), and Stern (2015) on this topic.

\(^{34}\) Hardimon (1994, 334), e.g., does so. I take it that a ‘social role’, in this sense, is a role that is understood as ‘for the good of society’. This is much narrower than what I am understanding as a role. Though I do not discuss them here, I also allow roles that are detrimental to society, such as thief. But even “tennis player” is not a social role.
role-demands only in virtue of occupying that position in the practice, the practice will be basic in this respect.

The final point that sets good skill-role occupants apart from mere skill-possessors follows closely from this. As mere skill-possessors have no obligation from within the concomitant practice to $\varphi$, demands on them to $\varphi$ must come from outside the practice itself. An individual merely skilled at tennis, for instance, may play ‘to get some exercise’ or ‘to please a friend’ or ‘to blow off some steam’; but they cannot play simply ‘because they are a tennis player’. Skill-role occupants, on the other hand, as concerns at least some skill-roles, not only can play for that reason; they are evaluable in terms of the extent to which they do.\(^{35}\) The good tennis player, for instance, does not just happen to play tennis; they play because they are a tennis player. Tennis is, as we sometimes say, what they do. They identify with their role. They are non-instrumentally committed to tennis and its distinctive demands.\(^{36}\)

The claim that the good skill-role occupant, as concerns at least some skill-roles, is non-instrumentally committed requires two preliminary clarifications. First, the claim is not meant to imply that lacking non-instrumental commitment necessarily makes one a bad occupant of a role. In line with this point, consider being a good husband.\(^{37}\) Part of what makes a husband a good husband is their being committed to their partner and relationship for its own sake. But this needn’t mean that a husband who treats their partner well for other reasons is an absolutely or definitively bad husband – presumably such a husband is better than the husband who intentionally treats their partner poorly and, so, is good at least relative to them. But such a husband is still bad relative to the non-instrumentally committed husband. The claim, then, is that commitment is ‘a good-making feature’ of a skill-role occupant, whereas instrumental commitment and lack of commitment are not. In that case, the best or ideal kind of skill-role

\(^{35}\) It is an interesting question whether this evaluability entails a demand to $\varphi$, but I remain neutral on that question here.

\(^{36}\) I leave to the side here how this kind of reason relates to Kant’s “acting from duty”. See Baron (2008) for a discussion of virtue and Kantian ethics. For a discussion of Schiller and Hegel’s earlier concern with the related, perceived difference between Kantian and virtue ethics, see Stern (2012, chp. 4). The similarity to Korsgaard’s (e.g., 1996 & 2009) notion of a ‘practical identity’ will be obvious here as well. A practical identity, however, is distinct from a skill-role – and to have a practical identity is also distinct from being a good role-occupant. First of all, one’s role (unlike one’s practical identity) needn’t be expressed in what one actually does (Korsgaard (2009, 101)), and it needn’t be a description under which one values oneself (ibid.). These are true of at least some good skill-role occupants, but there are also bad cases. A horrible parent, for instance, might not identify with their role at all. Further, having a practical identity also seems compatible with carrying it out horribly, which is incompatible with being a good role-occupant.

\(^{37}\) Again, I am happy thinking of “husband” as a skill-role, but if the reader does not, the example can serve simply as illustrative.
occupant will be non-instrumentally committed, though one might still be a relatively good role-occupant even without such commitment.38

The second clarification concerns the scope of the claim that ‘the good skill-role occupant’ is non-instrumentally committed. For the sake of my argument, it need only be true that the skill-role occupants of at least some skill-roles are good in virtue of their commitment. Here I’m following a point that we have seen Annas rely on above: viz., that in order for a thing X to be of a kind Y, it needn’t be the case that X shares every feature with every member of Y. It only needs to be the case that X shares crucial features with some members of Y. So even if being a good skill-role occupant requires non-instrumental commitment for only some skill-roles, that will be sufficient.39

Does being the best or ideal kind of skill-role occupant, then, require non-instrumental commitment for at least some skill-roles? Here I will offer two examples to the effect that it does, before attempting a general explanation. First, if one thinks that “husband” does not denote a skill-role – or, alternatively, thinks that it possesses the relevant feature merely because of its moral dimension – return to the example of being a good tennis player. The best or ideal kind of tennis player, the claim is, is non-instrumentally committed to tennis and its distinctive demands, while the less than ideal player has other motivations for playing. Imagine, for instance, watching Serena Williams win Wimbledon and then giving an interview in which she discusses her motivations for playing. Any of the following, I take it, would impugn her status simply as a tennis player: ‘I don’t care about tennis, I was simply playing for the prize money’ or ‘The only thing that really motivated me was proving to my friends that I could do it’ or ‘I entered the tournament and played like I did just because my coach told me to.’ None of these are bad motivations simpliciter, but much like the case of the instrumentally committed husband, they show a kind of disrespect for tennis that is, if not inappropriate for a tennis player, at least less than ideal. Someone else who played just as well, just as reliably, but was committed to tennis itself would be better qua tennis player.

38 Can one be instrumentally and non-instrumentally committed to something? Presumably, yes. The role-occupant whose instrumental commitment is stronger than their non-instrumental commitment, then, is good to an extent but not as good as they could be. In addition, it seems that at least some forms of instrumental commitment will be non-pernicious and, so, will not actively detract from a role-occupant’s goodness as concerns their motivation, whereas other forms will. I will not try here to give an account of which instrumental reasons will fall on which side of this line.

39 Notice that this does not revive the view that virtue is a kind of practical skill. For though some skilled individuals are non-instrumentally committed, that feature is not constitutive of any agent’s being skilled. Being non-instrumentally committed, on the other hand, sometimes is constitutive of an agent’s being a good skill-role occupant. Or at least that is my claim.
Or consider being a good artist. The ideal kind of artist, I take it, is non-instrumentally committed to art – in particular, they will be committed to creating art. They will not merely reliably create good art. They will love art; they will be devoted to it and to artistic creation for its own sake. Consider, for instance, Irving Stone’s portrayal of Vincent Van Gogh in his *Lust for Life*. For the sake of his work, Van Gogh regularly goes without much that he could otherwise have had: nice clothing, high society, and a reliable source of food. Instead, he lives in places and moves in circles that some of his friends consider unsuitable for him, wears clothes they consider unsuitable, and regularly goes without food – spending his money on models to paint, for instance, rather than on these other things. And when mocked by his cousin as ‘not a real artist’, on the basis that he has not been able to sell any of his work, Van Gogh responds by offering just the conception of the good artist in which we’re interested: ‘When I say I am an artist, I only mean “I am seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart”.’ He would certainly be a better artist were he also making art worth buying, but his commitment is part of what constitutes the goodness he does have as an artist.

If someone doubts that *any* kind of skill-role occupant is made good by such commitment, they likely doubt that any role and its related activity is non-instrumentally valuable – that is, doubt that any such thing is *properly* non-instrumentally valued.40 Such a person would see the value of roles, if at all, only ‘from the outside’, as extrinsic to them and as merely for the sake of something else. But if at least some skill-roles and their related activities are also of intrinsic value, such a doubter will be missing out on something. Indeed, then, so would the occupants of the relevant roles. If artistic creation is intrinsically valuable, for instance, then the artist who does not recognize that and does not create for its own sake would be less than an ideal artist. And the same will be true of a tennis player who does not recognize the value of tennis and engages in it merely instrumentally.41 As it seems that at least some such activities and their associated roles are of intrinsic value, however, being the most excellent skill-role occupant will sometimes require non-instrumental commitment.

This, then, is what a good skill-role occupant can be: someone with practical skill, fulfilling their function in a practice, and doing so from non-instrumental commitment. And this is the notion in terms of which I believe the skill analogy should be understood. I now

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40 I take it that the notion of such value can be given a realist or a non-realist reading.

41 My understanding of a role thus diverges from that of Dreyfus (1991, 95) and Blattner (1999, 83ff.), who understand “role”-talk as looking at an agent’s activity only from the outside, as denoting a ‘mere social status’ rather than a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’. In thinking that such talk can also look at an agent’s activity from the inside, my view is thus closer to that of Haugeland (e.g., (2013)).
want to offer some evidence that a similar notion is at work in Aristotle’s positive treatment of the analogy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, before returning to the objections with which we began this chapter.

### 4.3 Skill-Roles in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

Despite our having inherited the skill analogy from the ancient Greeks and others, I do not believe that we are completely beholden to them in understanding it. So, even if they did not understand the analogy in terms of roles rather than mere skills, that would not be conclusive evidence that it should not be understood in those terms. However, the ancients did understand the analogy in similar terms, at least at times. In particular, in drawing the analogy between virtuous and skilled individuals, they very often have in mind more than merely skilled individuals.

In the present section, I argue for this point by reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth, “the Ethics”). I think that in the Ethics, Aristotle in fact makes use of two distinct analogies with skill. But in drawing *positive* analogies between virtuous and skilled individuals, we often find him using a notion very similar to that of the good skill-role occupant. Here my aim is just to show the core of this positive use and to demarcate both how the notion he invokes goes beyond that of merely skilled individuals but also how it stops short of good skill-role occupants as I have understood them. I will offer some brief reasons to go further than Aristotle does, along the lines of the discussion of the previous section, but the primary aim is just to make our similarities and differences explicit. In §4.4, I then return to the seven objections with which we began, to show that understanding the skill analogy in terms of good skill-role occupants allows us to respond to each of them.

In discussing the core of Aristotle’s positive use of the analogy, two preliminary points are worth making. The first we saw in the Introduction to this thesis, while the second is new. First, what we translate as “virtue” (ἀρετή/aretē) in classical Greek is a fairly general term meaning ‘goodness’ or ‘excellence’. In the Ethics, in particular, the main topic is human excellence, or ethical virtue – which amounts to a human being’s ‘living well’ and ‘acting well’ (1095a18-20). But hammers are just as apt to be virtuous, in the general sense, as are human beings. Hammers of course do not live or act, but they can be excellent nonetheless. Second, as Aristotle understands virtue, the virtue of a thing is always related to its function or, in the case of human beings, to their ‘characteristic activity’ (εργον/ergon) (1139a17-18). Thus, hammers and human beings are only apt to be called excellent in this sense because they both...
have a function, some activity or use proper to them. For instance, the function of a human being on Aristotle’s account is to live, so our characteristic activity (*qua* human beings) is living (1097b30-1098a5). That is why a human being’s being excellent consists in their living well.

A key way in which Aristotle introduces these points is by use of an analogy with skilled individuals – in particular, by use of an analogy with what he calls ‘practitioners of skills’ (*τεχνίτες*, often translated “craftspeople”⁴³). In Book I, for instance, he makes an important connection between the good of each:

> Just as the good – the doing well – of a flute-player, a sculptor or any practitioner of a skill (*τεχνίτη*), or generally whatever has some characteristic activity (*εργον*) or action (*πραξις/praxis*), is thought to lie in its characteristic activity, so the same would seem to be true of a human being… *(NE* 1097b25-28)

Since the good (the doing well) of a human being is the same as their being virtuous, then, Aristotle can here be seen as drawing a connection between the virtuous human being and practitioners of skills on the basis that, like human beings, the latter have characteristic activities. Practitioners of skills, then, as Aristotle intends them, are no mere skill-possessors. They are individuals with a function related to their skill, some ongoing task or activity to carry out.⁴⁴ For Aristotle, just as the characteristic activity of a human being is living, so the characteristic activity of a practitioner of a skill is the exercise of their skill – the flute-player’s is playing the flute, the sculptor’s is sculpting, ‘and so on, without qualification’ (1098a11). And, further, as the good of anything with a characteristic activity is performing that characteristic activity well, a good practitioner of a skill is good in virtue of performing their characteristic activity well (1098a12-17). To this extent, then, good practitioners of skills are good skill-role occupants, rather than mere skill-possessors: like the mere skill-possessor, they possess skill, but they also have a function or characteristic activity concomitant with that skill, which they reliably perform well.

Performing one’s characteristic activity well, however, involves more than merely performing it and performing it successfully. An assumption of the *Ethics* is that ‘a good’ is anything worth acting for the sake of (1094a). So to say that the good of a thing with a

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⁴² I take for granted here that the form of life distinctive of human beings is different from that of other creatures and plants.

⁴³ These tend to be individuals who produce crafted objects, though not always. The lyre-player, for instance, also has *τέχνη*.

⁴⁴ Again, whether “function” should be seen as entailing a deontic normative status is a point of controversy. Anscombe (1958) and Darwall (2013) have argued that “ought”s are out of place in virtue ethics. I disagree. I think it is significant, for instance, that Aristotle says of the ‘sophisticated gentleman’ that he acts as he does ‘as a sort of law (*νόμος/nomos*) unto himself’ *(NE* 1128a30). A full response to this worry, however, would require its own discussion.
characteristic activity is performing that characteristic activity well means also that such performance is a thing worth aiming at for those who have that characteristic activity. Performing a characteristic activity well, that is, also involves having a certain kind of aim or reason for (and in) exercising one’s skill. It involves exercising one’s skill, as it were, because that is one’s characteristic activity.

The result in the case of a good human being is that they live and act well just for the sake of living and acting well – that is, they do so for its own sake. But as we saw in the introduction to this chapter in stating the Action/Production Objection, the result in the case of good practitioners of skills is supposed to be different. Whereas virtuous human beings act well for the sake of acting well, those with skills, according to Aristotle, exercise their skills for the sake of what their skills produce – meaning that good practitioners of skills are taken not to exercise their skills for their own sake.45

Aristotle’s main reason for thinking this seems to be that he thinks, for any activity with a product, that the product is always more valuable than the activity itself – implying that the activity itself is merely instrumentally valuable and properly instrumentally valued (1094a4ff.). Along these lines, he says, ‘The products of the skills have their worth within themselves, so it is enough for them to be turned out with a certain quality’ (1105a26). This, then, marks the main difference between ‘good practitioners of skills’ as Aristotle understands them and ‘good skill-role occupants’ as I understand them. Whereas good practitioners of skills, on Aristotle’s account, do not exercise their skills non-instrumentally – they exercise them for what they produce – good skill-role occupants (of at least some skill-roles), on my account, do exercise their skills non-instrumentally. They fulfil their function and find doing so to be intrinsically valuable. Their activity going well is not a means to producing anything separate from their activity, then, but is, rather, a part of their activity itself – which, in turn, is an important aspect of who they are.46

45 One question that arises for Aristotle here is ‘Can practitioners of skills, then, not be virtuous?’ He seems forced to say that they cannot. This may be a precursor of his final view of the virtuous human being as purely contemplative (NE 1178a35ff.). Or it may suggest that this distinction between action and production will not hold much weight. In the Ethics, however, Aristotle clearly holds that it does stand; hence, that a practitioner of skill does not exercise their skill for its own sake.

46 Swanton (2007, 208) relies on a similar difference with Aristotle, implicitly agreeing also that his ‘practitioners of skills’ are to be understood as a kind of role-occupant: ‘The goodness of a role [on Aristotle’s account] is determined by reference to its place in the life of a good human being… [But t]here is another, non-Aristotelian, possibility… [R]oles must themselves be worthwhile or valuable.’
4.4 Return to the Objections

4.4.1 The Aristotelian Objections

In §4.1, I argued that two prominent proposals for how the skill analogy gets misunderstood are incorrect and that at least the second of these proposals depends on the possibility of distinguishing between merely skilled individuals and good skill-role occupants. A skill-role occupant, again, is an individual subject to certain demands of the concomitant practice, including demands to exercise their skill and to exercise it well, and at least as concerns some skill-roles, the good skill-role occupant does so out of non-instrumental commitment.

Finally, I have also argued that a similar notion is at work in Aristotle’s positive use of the analogy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Again, Aristotle stops short of seeing good practitioners of skills exactly as I see good skill-role occupants, but the former still amount to more than mere skill-possessors; they have a characteristic activity, which they fulfil reliably and well.

Again, my contention is that the skill analogy is correctly understood as likening the virtuous human being to the good skill-role occupant – and perhaps to the extent that the virtuous human being is a good skill-role occupant. Here, we return to the seven objections with which we began, to see whether conceiving of the analogy in these terms can account for those objections as promised. In doing so, rather than constantly making the qualification that non-instrumental commitment makes one a good role-occupant ‘for at least some skill-roles’, I will simply be talking in terms of good skill-role occupants; but I will have in mind just those roles for which this is the case.

I begin with the four Aristotelian objections. If the above account has been adequately detailed, we should be able to respond to each objection fairly quickly. And if each is met, the skill analogy has much more going for it than many have thought. It not only has those points which a comparison with practical skill has to offer but, also, those additional points offered by a comparison with being a good role-occupant.

The Action/Production Objection has already received a fair bit of attention in the above sections. Again, Aristotle claims that whereas the virtuous person acts well for its own sake, the skilled person exercises their skill for what it produces (*NE* 1105a28-35, 1140a1-18). To choose an action for what it produces, again, is to perform it instrumentally; whereas to choose it for its own sake is to perform it non-instrumentally. As I have argued above, however, good skill-role occupants also exercise their skill non-instrumentally; they are

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47 “[W]hile production has an end distinct from itself, this could not be so with action, since the end here is acting well itself” (*NE* 1140b6-8).
characterised by non-instrumental commitment to their practice. Thus, if we understand the skill analogy in terms of good skill-role occupancy, the Action/Production Objection misses the mark.

Next, the Firm Character Objection is the objection that whereas the virtuous person acts from a firm and unchanging character, the skilled individual does not (NE 1105a28-35). Like the idea of the good of a human being, Aristotle introduces the idea of having a firm and unchanging character (which he sometimes also refers to as ‘stable’ or ‘unshakeable’) by comparison with good practitioners of skills. He says,

"[T]he truly wise and good person, we believe, bears all the fortunes of life with dignity and always does the noblest thing in the circumstances, as a good general does the most strategically appropriate thing with the army at his disposal, and a shoemaker makes the noblest shoe out of the leather he is given, and so on with other practitioners of skills. If this is so, the good person could never become wretched...Nor indeed will he be unstable and changeable. He will not be shifted easily...and not by ordinary misfortunes, but by many grave ones. (NE 1101a)"

To have a firm character, then, is to continue to be disposed to act well even in difficult circumstances, so long as those circumstances stay within reason. The virtuous human being is so-disposed. But as Aristotle makes clear in this passage, so are good practitioners of skills. When he makes the Firm Character Objection itself, then, Aristotle clearly relies on a distinct analogy to the one invoked in this passage. As he notes here, good practitioners of skills reliably perform their function well – and the better the practitioner, the more reliable. The good skill-role occupant, then, certainly will as well. For they, too, reliably perform their function well, and they do so in the additional sense they do so out of non-instrumental commitment.

Next is the Voluntary Mistakes Objection. This is the objection that the individual who makes voluntary mistakes is preferable in the case of skill but not in the case of virtue (NE 1140a21-24) – “preferable” meaning, as Philippa Foot (2002) has put it, that voluntary mistakes impugn a person’s virtue but not their skill. So, for instance, shooting an arrow and intentionally missing the target (when one ought not to) does not impugn one’s skill at archery; but voluntarily lying (when one ought not to) does impugn one’s virtue. As we have seen, however, the overall goodness of the skill-role occupant, unlike their skill alone, is constituted by their exercising their skill in accordance with the demands of the practice. Being a good such role-occupant requires not only the ability to do well but, also, a commitment to doing well.

48 This objection is especially related to the ‘situationist challenge’. See Lott (2014) for a good discussion of that challenge as concerns the skill analogy.
In competition, for instance, the good archer is able and committed to hitting the target. Voluntary mistakes, then, do impugn their status as a good occupant of their role, and the Voluntary Mistakes Objection thus misses the mark.

The last of the Aristotelian objections is the Practical Wisdom Objection, the objection that whereas virtue requires practical wisdom, skill does not. This objection is also stated by Aristotle as that skills are ignorant of the universal good and fail to look for it (NE 1097a5-8), that what conduces to living well as a whole ‘lies outside the ambit of a skill’ (NE 1140a27-31), and that production (and, by implication, skill) is ‘not concerned with what is good and bad for a human being’ (NE 1140b5-6). How can we respond?

True, the good skill-role occupant is not concerned with what is good or bad for a human being qua human being. But they are concerned with what is good and bad for an occupant of their role – that is, they are concerned with doing well in their role. The good tennis player is concerned with doing well as a tennis player, the good doctor with doing well as a doctor. And, of course, as good occupants of these roles, they also in fact do well in them. So, though the universal good (again, taken as a good life) is not their concern qua occupant of their role, they do possess something analogous to practical wisdom. They are concerned with what is good and bad for a thing occupying their role and they choose well as concerns it; and that is all that an analogy with virtue requires. The challenge put forward in the Practical Wisdom Objection, then, is met as well.

4.4.2 The Contemporary Objections

Only the three contemporary objections remain. I begin with the Capacity/Disposition Objection, the objection that whereas skill is a mere capacity to act well, virtue is a disposition to do so. It should be obvious by now that this objection is closely related to at least the Firm Character and Voluntary Mistakes objections, for they too rely on skill’s being a mere capacity to act well. As we responded there, we can thus say here that the good skill-role occupant does not merely have the practical ability to act well; such an individual is disposed to and does act

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49 Aristotle, in fact, seems to admit this late in the Ethics, when he says that medicine and the other sciences ‘require some kind of care and practical wisdom’ (NE 1180b28). The implication is that there are kinds of practical wisdom.

50 Stichter responds similarly in saying that the Practical Wisdom Objection asks that skill be coextensive with virtue (2016, 446-447). That alone, however, cannot be a response to the objection. To be analogous, skill requires an analogous feature.
well. The good doctor, for instance, does not sit at home all their life. They exercise their skill. They, again, are both skilled at and committed to their practice. So interpreting the skill analogy in terms of good skill-role occupancy sidesteps the Capacity/Disposition Objection.

Next is the No-Vice-Analogue Objection, the objection that virtue is disanalogous to skill because there is no ‘vice-analogue’ for skill. Why is there no vice-analogue for skill? First, we should say what vice is, at least roughly. Whereas virtue is a disposition to act well, vice is a disposition to act badly – either to act instrumentally in accordance with standards of good action or else to act out of accord with those standards altogether. As a disposition to act badly, though, there can be no vice-analogue in skill, because lacking skill is either lacking a capacity altogether or else having a capacity to do something only badly. And neither of these is a positive disposition to act badly.

There is, however, a vice-analogue for the good skill-role occupant. There is the bad skill-role occupant, who is disposed to act poorly. Such an individual is the bad doctor, cobbler, or teacher. They, too, are bad either in virtue of acting in accordance with the standards of their practice for the wrong reasons or else in virtue of acting out of accord with those standards altogether. The bad occupant of a skill-role, like the vicious human being, is the person who has learned to act badly, as the virtuous person and good skill-role occupant have learned to act well.51 Just as the vicious human being is still a human being, the bad role-occupant is still a role-occupant; they just occupy the role badly. Thus, understanding the skill analogy in terms of good skill-role occupants also allows us to avoid the No-Vice-Analogue Objection.

Finally, we have the No-Bad-Ends Objection, the objection that whereas skill can be used for either good or bad ends, virtue can only be used for good ends. The view of virtue implied here is especially contentious, and if it fails, then so does the objection.52 But I will argue that even if the implied view of virtue is correct, the No-Bad-Ends Objection is met by a correct understanding of the skill analogy.

I will take it, again, that the ‘good end’ of virtue implied by the No-Bad-Ends Objection is what we above called ‘life going well as a whole’. That, at least, is what we must say if we continue to take a roughly Aristotelian line on virtue. The question that the No-Bad-Ends

51 (NE 1103b9-10; Jacobson (2005, 395) tries to use the fact that vice is like skill in this way to argue against the skill analogy. Clearly, that attempt is misplaced. Vice should fit the skill model if the skill analogy is to be a good one. (Annas (2015) makes essentially this same point.)

52 See, e.g., MacIntyre (1981, 142), Zagzebski (1996, 93), and Jacobson (2005, 400) for dissenting views.
Objection asks of us, then, is ‘Does the good skill-role occupant (qua role-occupant) also have life going well as a whole as their end?’ We can answer here much as we did concerning the Practical Wisdom Objection: No, not every skill-role occupant qua occupant of that role has life going well as a whole as their aim, but every such occupant does aim at life going well within their role, at doing well by the standards of the practice of which that role is a part. The problem with the No-Bad-Ends Objection, then, as with the Practical Wisdom Objection, is that it asks that goodness in a role be ethical virtue; but good skill-role occupants only need an end concomitant with their roles in order to be analogous to the virtuous human being in this respect. And they have such ends. They have the ends of cobblerly, medicine, and tennis, for instance. They pursue those ends for their own sake, not for the sake of life going well as a whole. And this leaves ethical virtue in particular, and its required practical wisdom, the jobs often associated with them: that of evaluating and organising the various parts of a life – one’s various roles and projects – into a whole, coherent life.

4.5 Conclusion

We saw earlier how natural it is to talk of the virtuous human being as a ‘role model’. If each of the above objections is met, we now have further reason to think that being a virtuous human being is being a good skill-role occupant. The virtuous human’s distinctive skill would be ‘skill at living’; the know-how they possess, knowledge how to live. As things stand, however, we would have to conclude that virtue is not equivalent with such skill. For being a good human being, like being many other kinds of good skill-role occupant, requires more than mere skill, as we have discussed it here. It requires, as we have seen, a certain kind of non-instrumental commitment to a practice. So being virtuous would require not only knowing-how to live, but being non-instrumentally commitment to life and to living well. I have argued by analogy that such commitment is the main difference between the virtuous human being and the mere skill-possession. In the next and final chapter, however, I turn to look more closely at this claim and at the kind of commitment on which it turns.
Chapter 5
Is Commitment a Skill?

(W)e take it for granted that as the intellect is notoriously the one department into which lessons go, our wills and feelings are not teachable. They cannot know anything…
– Gilbert Ryle\(^1\)

5.0 Introduction

In arguing that the skill analogy likens the virtuous agent to the good skill-role occupant, we seem to have reached a view not too distant from the view ascribed to Ryle in Chapter 1. There we saw that from around 1958 onward, Ryle holds that virtue is not a skill because being virtuous constitutively requires care about acting well and not acting poorly, whereas skill does not require anything analogous. Similarly, in the previous chapter, I have argued that some good skill-role occupants (and, by analogy, virtuous human beings) are non-instrumentally committed to their practice and to engaging in it well. In the case of the virtuous human being, this means that they are non-instrumentally committed to life and to living well.

When Ryle discusses care, he clearly intends for it to be non-instrumental as well. But whereas he is willing to liken such care to mere enjoyment – such as the mere enjoyment of playing tennis\(^2\) – I have suggested that virtue requires a deeper, identity-defining form of commitment, more akin to love than mere enjoyment. As we will see, this has important implications not only for the relation between virtue and skill but also, and consequently, for Ryle’s late arguments against the view that virtue could be a kind of knowledge.

\(^1\) Ryle (1972, 442)
\(^2\) Ryle (1958, 385)
My main concern in this final chapter is to address a key challenge that was left unanswered in the previous chapter and, just as importantly, to tease out the implications of meeting that challenge for the claim that virtue is not a skill. The challenge is to show that commitment really could be the key difference between skill and virtue. In the previous chapter, I suggested that it is by suggesting that a certain kind of commitment explains various ‘other’ differences between skill and virtue that philosophers have been pointing out since at least Aristotle. Chief amongst these were two which form the basis of Aristotle’s own objections to the idea that virtue could be a skill. Roughly, these were (1) that whereas virtue requires stable and sufficient motivation to act well, skill does not; and (2) that whereas virtue requires specifically non-instrumental motivation, skill, again, does not.\(^3\) I suggested that the commitment of the good role-occupant accounts for each of these differences.

I take it that the possibility of non-instrumental commitment is plausible enough that the second of the above points is met simply by invoking such commitment. But one might reasonably doubt that commitment will necessarily account for the first point, that virtue requires stable and sufficient motivation to act well. For, generally speaking, commitment comes in both more and less stable forms, as well as stronger and weaker forms. And even if we specify that the commitment intended is stable and strong, for instance, this will not on its own entail that it is stable and strong enough to be sufficient for acting well and for doing so across a life. Temptation, for instance, is often strong as well, so simply noting that an agent’s commitment is strong will be no guarantee of good action and motivation. And, again, as even reasonably stable commitment may not last long enough for an agent to live a good life, being merely reasonably stable may be insufficient as well. If commitment really is to be the main difference between skill and virtue, then, we need a further specification of the kind of commitment intended. That is the challenge.

Fortunately, the recent literature on commitment has provided us with various notions of commitment that would seem suited to this task. To take just one example, in his *Will as Commitment and Resolve* (2007), John Davenport develops a notion of commitment that he calls ‘aretaic commitment’, which he describes as entailing a high degree of success at acting for the

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\(^3\) More fully, these are stated by Aristotle as (1) that the virtuous agent acts from a firm and unshakeable character and (2) that the virtuous agent chooses the virtuous action for its own sake (*NE* 1105a28-30). The idea that commitment might account for these points has been suggested as well in the existentialist literature. Roberts (1997), for example, argues that Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘concern’ (or what Roberts says we might also call ‘commitment’) is meant precisely to account for these features of the virtuous agent.
sake of the thing to which one is committed. This feature plausibly makes such commitment suitably stable and strong to be a component of virtue. One task here will thus be to see whether such success really could be entailed by some form of commitment. That is how I attempt to meet the above challenge.

The possibility of conceiving of commitment as entailing ‘a high degree of success at acting’, however, should make us re-think the suggestion that such commitment would make for a difference between skill and virtue. Skill too, as we have seen, is itself regularly discussed in terms of reliably successful action. Indeed, that seems to be one of the key components of any understanding of skill. At least on the face of it, then, this feature draws commitment towards the notion of a skill, rather than away from it. It suggests that we might reasonably ask, ‘Is commitment itself a skill?’

Notice that an affirmative answer to this question would at the very least weaken the suggestion that virtue is not a form of skill. For if commitment is itself a skill, then the fact that virtue and skill can be distinguished in terms of a form of commitment would at least be inconclusive for determining whether virtue is or is not a form of skill. Indeed, if commitment is itself a form of skill, that would seem rather to strengthen the idea that virtue is as well. For if virtue includes but goes beyond skill in requiring commitment (as has been the suggestion of the previous chapter), then if commitment itself turns out to be a skill of some kind, virtue would still not consist of any simple form of skill, but it would consist of something like a suite of skills.

In this final chapter, I follow this line of thinking and ask whether commitment is a skill. Or, rather, though I begin by speaking simply in terms of ‘commitment’, I ask whether some form of commitment is a skill. I aim to address this question in three steps. In §5.1, I discuss what philosophers like Davenport mean when they say that commitment entails a high degree of success at acting for the sake of a thing. Calling this claim ‘the Success Claim’, I argue that the kind of success most plausibly attributed by the Success Claim is success at taking

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4 Davenport (2007, 486) claims to be following Blustein (1992) on this point. One might interpret Blustein’s point as slightly weaker, but I will not take up that argument here.

5 As the name ‘aretaic commitment’ suggests, that is what Davenport intends (2007, 5-6).

6 Hawley (2003) contains the seminal argument for the claim that know-how entails reliable success at acting. In slight contrast to this, the ancient Greeks had an infallibilist notion of skill, such that insofar as one exercises one’s skill, one cannot but be successful. I leave the infallibilist notion to the side here, but see, e.g., Newar (2018).

7 There is some precedent for a positive answer. Haugeland (1998b, 340-343) seems to think of what he calls ‘existential commitment’ as a kind of skill. And though Holton (2009) does not talk of ‘commitment’, he does entertain the idea that ‘strength of will’ is a ‘skill of will power’ (e.g., xi & 72ff.).
action and exerting effort – forms of what I will call ‘volitional success’, distinct from the kind of success normally discussed in relation to skill, which I will call ‘practical success’. In §5.2, I then consider whether the truth of the Success Claim would mean that commitment is itself a kind of skill. I argue that if the Success Claim is true, commitment entails at least possession of a kind of skill – what I call ‘volitional skill’, distinct from the more commonly discussed ‘practical skills’. And, thirdly, in §5.3 I ask whether the Success Claim is true for any form of commitment – that is, I ask whether any form of commitment plausibly does entail a high degree of volitional success. I argue that by looking at paradigms of the form of commitment introduced in the previous chapter, we see that some forms of commitment do entail a high degree of volitional success and, further, have such success as a proper part of our understanding of them. These, then, are volitional skills, suited to serve as the key difference between virtue and practical skill but unsuited to show that virtue is not itself a kind of skill.

In concluding, I return to Ryle’s main arguments against both the claim that virtue is a kind of skill and the claim that it is not any other kind of knowledge. I argue that if the kind of commitment necessary for virtue is a volitional skill, both objections are met.

5.1 The Success Claim

In the present section, I explain what philosophers mean when they say that commitment entails a high degree of success at acting for the sake of the thing to which one is committed – what I have above called ‘the Success Claim’. I have noted that John Davenport claims this of what he calls ‘aretaic commitment’, but he is joined by various others who discuss closely related (if not identical) phenomena. Harry Frankfurt, for instance, plausibly expresses a claim much like the Success Claim about ‘care’ when he says that one’s cares define what one’s will is, rather than just what one intends one’s will to be.8 Agnes Callard plausibly does so about ‘love’ when she says that whereas both strong-willed and moderate agents love the noble, weak-willed agents do not.9 And John Haugeland plausibly does so about what he calls

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8 The full quote from Frankfurt: ‘If we consider that a person’s will is that by which he moves himself, then what he cares about is far more germane to the character of his will than the decisions or choices he makes. The latter may pertain to what he intends to be his will, but not necessarily to what his will truly is’ (Frankfurt 1988, 84). Davenport (2007, 466) agrees that this is an endorsement of the Success Claim.

9 Or, at least, the weak-willed agent does not love it sufficiently. This will be a topic of §5.4. Callard (2017) offers this view as an interpretation of Aristotle against others (such as McDowell (1979) and (1996)) who hold that enkrateia is just as ‘problematic’ (relative to virtue) as akrasia. (She does not, then, distinguish between weakness of will and akrasia as some others do (e.g., Holton (2009)). She argues that whereas enkrateia requires phronesis (which Callard argues, in turn, requires love of the noble), akrasia does not. That Aristotle takes virtue to require love is the standard account
‘existential commitment’ when he says that existential commitment is a dedicated or devoted way of living, rather than a mere psychological state.\textsuperscript{10} In addition to addressing the Success Claim in terms of commitment, then, it seems we might also have done so in terms of love or care – even if not Ryle’s notion of care. And, indeed, though I will be speaking primarily in terms of commitment, I will later be returning to some features common to discussions of all three.

The immediate task, however, is to say precisely what the Success Claim ascribes to the committed agent. I mentioned above that I will understand it as claiming that the committed agent reliably succeeds at taking action and exerting effort for the sake of the thing to which they are committed, and that the kind of success thus ascribed is to be understood as ‘volitional’ success. Both points require explanation and defence.

On a first reading, it can seem that the Success Claim ascribes something more than this. Consider, for instance, Davenport’s most explicit expression of it: ‘Commitment to some X,’ he says, ‘implies the ability to act for X’s sake and some significant level of success in doing so…’ (Davenport 2007, 486). It can be tempting to read this as claiming that an agent who is committed to some X not only succeeds at taking action and exerting effort for the sake of X but also succeeds in the performance of whatever action is thereby taken. Such a reading, however, clearly has little connection to our everyday understanding of commitment. Indeed, depending on how we interpret the claim that ‘commitment to X’ entails ‘success in the performance of actions taken for the sake of X’, it would seem to have one of two absurd consequences, as follows.

If the relation is interpreted as one of causal entailment, commitment to X would be understood as imbuing agents with whatever abilities are necessary for success in their endeavours for the sake of X. This would make commitment a kind of magic. Commitment to my child, for instance, were my child to have cancer, would imbue me with the abilities necessary for finding the cure for cancer; and commitment to my fellow citizens, were they to need a bomb defused, would imbue me with the abilities necessary for defusing bombs. But (both fortunately and unfortunately) this is not commitment as we know it. The committed agent does not, simply in virtue of being committed, have the ability to succeed in any of their committed endeavours.

\textsuperscript{10} Haugeland (1998b, 341)

(see Burnyeat (1980, 78).) What sets Callard’s view apart is that she lists both moderation (\textit{sophronia}) and \textit{enkratiea} as compatible with virtue.
If, on the other hand, the relation is interpreted as one of logical or conceptual entailment, commitment to X would be understood as entailing being highly likely to succeed in any action taken for X’s sake. If this were true, I would thereby count as uncommitted to my child just in virtue of the fact that I am unlikely to find the cure for cancer; and I would similarly count as uncommitted to my fellow citizens just in virtue of the fact that I am unlikely to succeed in defusing the bomb threatening them. But this, too, is not commitment as we know it. Being unlikely to succeed in one’s committed endeavours does not render one uncommitted.

The problem with these interpretations is that each understands commitment as entailing a high degree of what I want to call ‘practical success’. Practical success is success in the performance of an action taken; it is performing an action taken correctly or well. The reason that the above interpretations seem absurd is that while commitment no doubt spurs us to practical success, it itself is perfectly compatible with reliable practical failure. If this weren’t the case, we would be without Romeo and Juliet, and Captain Ahab, and many other deeply committed individuals who are nonetheless (practically) unsuccessful in their endeavours.

Davenport makes clear, however, that practical success is not the kind he intends in making the Success Claim. Immediately following the above quote, he says that commitment is thus to be understood as ‘a phenomenon of volitional effort’, like trying – and, in particular, a phenomenon that is incompatible with akrasia, rather than a high degree of practical failure. The Success Claim, then, though strong, is weaker than the claim that commitment entails a high degree of practical success. What the committed agent reliably succeeds at, according to the Success Claim, is simply trying or taking action and exerting effort. These are forms of what I will call volitional success – they are successes of the will.

In further elaborating what volitional success is, it will be helpful to discuss two reasons one could have for doubting that these are properly understood as forms of success. The first is that we would not usually say of an individual who merely tries to defuse a bomb, for instance, that they have ‘succeeded’, nor of a scientist who merely tries to find the cure for cancer, that they have. This worry, however, again mistakes volitional success for practical success. True, we do not usually say of an individual merely trying or taking action that they have succeeded,

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11 It is worth noting that one can perform an action taken correctly or well and yet fail to achieve the end of the action. So, for instance, one can perform CPR correctly or well but not succeed at resuscitating the individual. The skills related to such tasks are sometimes referred to as ‘stochastic skills’. See, e.g., Klein (2014).

12 Davenport (2007, 486)
but we sometimes do. Consider the akratic agent. The akratic agent is akratic for failing to act on their better judgement, implying that if they had acted on their better judgement, that would have amounted to a kind of success – not practical success, necessarily, since they may still have failed to perform correctly or well the action taken but, rather, volitional success. If I am tempted to run away from the bomb that threatens my fellow citizens rather than defusing it, my merely trying to defuse it is likely already a form of success. That we do not usually say of an individual who merely tries or takes action that they have succeeded, then, is not a problem for the view that doing so is sometimes a form of success.

Such examples of agents overcoming temptation, however, involve a level of difficulty, and this can suggest that volitional success requires difficulty. The second reason to think that exerting effort and taking action are not properly understood as forms of success, then, would be that doing so is not always difficult. Though the akratic agent does find it difficult to take the correct action, the moderate agent usually does not. And in that case, it might seem that the moderate agent’s taking the correct action is not a form of volitional success. The response, however, is simply that volitional success does not require difficulty. Consider, for comparison, cases of practical success: making a free-throw in basketball, for instance, will be very easy for the expert player but difficult for the novice; but this does not mean that the novice succeeds when they make a free-throw whereas the expert does not succeed when they do. Clearly, both succeed. Similarly, acting on one’s better judgement will be very easy for the moderate agent but more difficult for akratic and enkratic agents; nonetheless, all three, when they act on their better judgement, succeed volitionally. Taking an action needn’t be difficult, then, to be a form of success.

Rather, it seems there are two respects in which an effort or attempt might be volitionally successful. The first is if the agent (in taking action and exerting effort) does what they take to be called-for. I am volitionally successful in this sense, for instance, insofar as I do what I take it that I ought to do, with the level of effort I take to be required. And the second is if the agent does what is in fact called-for. I am volitionally successful in this sense insofar as I do what I in fact ought to do, with the level of effort in fact required. Given these two respects, even if an agent merely succeeds at doing what they take to be called-for, that is already a point in their favour – their will is, in that respect, in good order. Whereas if an agent does what is in fact called-for, that is also a point in their favour – their will is, in that respect, in good order. If both respects of success obtain, they are as volitionally successful as could
be; if one but not the other obtains, they could have done better; and if neither obtains, they couldn’t have done worse.

Since the kind of success at issue in the Success Claim is success at taking action for the sake of a thing, what counts as ‘success’ is set by ‘the thing’ – more specifically, by what benefits the thing or by what the thing needs or requires. When a parent takes action for the sake of their child, for instance, they do what will benefit their child, or what their child needs. Given the above two respects in which an agent can be volitionally successful, then, the kind of volitional success at issue in the Success Claim will be a matter either of the agent’s doing what they take to be for the sake of the thing or else also what is in fact for its sake. It will be taking action and exerting effort in accord with one, the other, or both of these.

This ambivalence in the notion of volitional success might seem to be problematic. It might seem to cause problems for understanding whether the Success Claim is plausibly true of commitment. For if we want to understand whether commitment entails a high degree of volitional success, but such success can either consist in doing what is in fact for the sake of a thing or just what is taken to be for its sake, what commitment entails will not be straightforward. We can resolve this worry, however, by asking which, if either, of these forms of volitional success commitment plausibly concerns.

At first glance, it will seem that commitment does not require doing what is in fact for the sake of that to which one is committed. Commitment to a friend, for instance, seems expressed just as much in doing something for the sake of a hallucination of them as it is in doing something for the real them, despite the fact that the former is clearly not in their interest. If I think that I see my friend stumbling out into busy traffic, for instance, my commitment to them is expressed in my going to stop them, even if it turns out that my vision was a hallucination. And commitment to a friend also seems expressed in doing A for them, when I believe that A is what they need, even if they in fact need B. Thus, if I see my friend stumbling out into busy traffic and believe that a warning will stop them, even if it will not, my warning them seems also to express commitment to them. Cases like this suggest that if we were to choose between thinking that commitment entails action that is in fact for the sake of a thing and thinking, rather, that commitment only entails action that is taken to be for its sake, we should choose the latter.

Commitment, however, clearly aims at doing what is in fact for the sake of its object, rather than what is merely taken to be. Indeed, it seems clear that aiming at doing what is in fact for the sake of a thing is constitutive of commitment to it. A state that does not so-aim is
not commitment. It would rather seem, then, that we should think of commitment as analogous to belief on this point. For while a belief is still a belief even if false, as belief constitutively aims at the truth, a false belief is a deficient one. Similarly, as commitment constitutively aims at doing what is in fact for the sake of a thing, commitment that expresses itself in actions that are merely taken to be for the sake of a thing will still be a form of commitment, just a deficient form. The kind of success at issue in the Success Claim, in that case, should be understood as concerning either what is merely taken to be for the sake of a thing or what is also in fact for the sake of a thing; though in the best cases of commitment, success will consist in action that is also in fact for the sake of the thing. (We will return to some other constitutive aims of commitment later in assessing the truth of the Success Claim.)

Finally, we have the last aspect of the Success Claim: that it ascribes a ‘high degree’ of volitional success to the committed agent. This aspect of the Success Claim is ambiguous as well, but I take it to have both of the meanings we might ascribe to it. The first meaning is a synchronic one. In this sense, that the committed agent has a high degree of volitional success means that on a given occasion, when action is either in fact called-for or taken to be called-for, the committed will be highly likely to take such action on that occasion and to exert the requisite effort. So while a ‘blip’ is possible on any given occasion (in which case the committed agent does not take the called-for action, or even the action taken to be called-for), this will be just that – a blip, an unlikely event that needn’t impugn the agent’s commitment.13 The second meaning of the notion of a ‘high degree’ of volitional success is a diachronic one. In this sense, that the committed agent has a high degree of volitional success means that they will be highly likely across time to take action for the sake of the thing to which they are committed. The Success Claim thus understands commitment (of the relevant kind) as being highly stable; it implies that the kind of commitment at issue is a kind that lasts.14 Of course, as noted above, even highly stable commitment may be insufficient for living a good life, but we will return to

13 I assume that a major offense to the object of one’s commitment will not count as a mere blip. So being highly likely to act for the sake of the thing to which one is committed will in all likelihood be incompatible with major offenses – affairs, for instance, when the commitment is to a spouse, or acting in a way opposite to that called-for, when the commitment is to a principle. Hopefully without begging any questions, compare this to the person with a practical skill: even the highly skilled archer will have an off day, but when they do, they will miss the bullseye by a small amount, rather than missing the target completely.

14 This understanding of commitment is well-known from Bernard Williams, who understands commitments as ‘lasting pursuits that give intelligible shape to a sustained course of activity’ (Williams 1973, 116). It is also known from Harry Frankfurt, who understands a person’s (or man’s) caring as ‘entail[ing] and… entailed by his own continuing concern with what he does with himself and with what goes on in his life’ (Frankfurt 1988, 83-84). See also Davenport (2007, 475).
this point below. For now, we can simply understand the kind of success ascribed by the Success Claim as reliable, both synchronically and diachronically.

In sum, then, I have argued that the Success Claim should be understood as the claim that commitment to some X entails a high degree of success at taking action and exerting effort for the sake of X—i.e., as ascribing to the committed agent a form of reliable volitional success. In the next section, with this understanding in hand, we turn to whether the truth of the Success Claim would entail that commitment is a kind of skill.

5.2 Skill and the Success Claim

I noted in the introduction to this chapter that skill itself is standardly understood as entailing a sort of reliable successful action. This was our initial reason for thinking that if commitment entails reliable success at acting for the sake of a thing, commitment might itself be a kind of skill. The kind of success that skill is usually taken to entail, however, is what we have above called ‘practical success’—success in the performance of an action taken. The person skilled at doing backflips, for instance, reliably succeeds in doing a backflip when they try to do one; and the person skilled at diffusing bombs reliably succeeds in diffusing a bomb when they try to defuse a bomb. The kind of reliable success we have seen ascribed by the Success Claim, however, is volitional success—success simply at taking action and exerting effort. And this would seem to cast doubt on the idea that the truth of the Success Claim would entail that commitment is a skill. In the present section, I argue that it does not in fact do so; for though the kind of skill that entails practical success (viz., ‘practical skill’) is what most commonly goes by the name, it is not the only kind. And this leaves space for what we might call ‘volitional skill’, the kind of skill that would explain reliable volitional success. As we will see in the present section, if the Success Claim is true, then commitment at least entails possession of such a skill.

I begin with the idea of practical skill. As reflected in the above examples of backflips and bomb-diffusings, practical skill at φ-ing is a reliable, intelligent ability to φ (correctly or well) when one tries to φ. This does not mean, however, that practical skill gives one a high chance of achieving practical success whatever the circumstances. If I am practically skilled at doing back-flips but my feet are presently encased in the cement of the sidewalk, for instance, my attempting a backflip will pretty certainly fail, despite my skill. As a result, accounts of practical skill tend to have an ‘under normal circumstances’ clause built into them. The agent practically skilled at φ-ing reliably achieves practical success when they attempt φ-ing under
normal circumstances.\textsuperscript{15} Normal circumstances are of course difficult to spell out or agree on, but such an account plausibly captures what we mean in ascribing a practical skill. In saying of someone that they are skilled at \( \varphi \)-ing, we mean that they can pull off \( \varphi \)-ing in some set of more or less circumscribed circumstances, rather than that they can do so whatever the circumstances – though the more skilled an individual is, the wider the circumstances in which they would succeed, were they to attempt the kind of action in question.

That ‘practical skill’ provides the standard conception of skill is obvious from the most common objections to the strong version of the skill analogy. We saw in the previous chapter the objection that whereas virtue is a disposition to act well, skill is a mere capacity to act well, and also that whereas intentional mistakes impugn virtue, they do not impugn skill. These objections allow that the skilled agent possesses a kind of reliability but not reliability simply at taking the relevant kinds of action – that is, at putting the skill to work. They assume that the skilled agent reliably succeeds when they try and thus assume that “skill” means ‘practical skill’.

But there are clearly forms of skill that do not fall neatly under this heading. Philosophers often talk, for instance, of perceptual skills\textsuperscript{16} and reasoning skills\textsuperscript{17}, and neither is a reliable ability to \( \varphi \) correctly or well when one tries to \( \varphi \). In paradigmatic exercises of perceptual and reasoning skills, unlike practical skills, one does not intentionally do what one does. In seeing birch trees as birch trees, for instance, I usually do not try to see them as birch trees. Possessing skill at recognising birch trees means that I just reliably do see them that way, when confronted with them. And the same goes for fallacious arguments and ‘seeing’ them as fallacious. These are reliable, intelligent abilities to do things without trying – i.e., kinds of ‘disposition’. And once one has such abilities, there is usually no room for trying to see or reason otherwise, at least not without re-training.\textsuperscript{18} Clearly there are skills, then, that are not practical skills; and this gives us some initial reason to think that the fact that the Success Claim does not concern practical skill does not preclude it from concerning skill altogether.

\textsuperscript{15} Though Hawley (2003) explicitly refers, rather, to ‘counterfactual circumstances’, I take it she means ‘normal circumstances’. For if an agent who knows how to \( \varphi \) will only succeed under counterfactual circumstances, they will not succeed under the factual circumstances, \textit{whatever} those circumstances are. And we clearly do not want that. It is only in odd circumstances (whatever those are) that the skilled agent fails in their attempt to perform the action-type in question.

\textsuperscript{16} See, e.g., Munton (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{17} See, e.g., Kuhn (1991).

\textsuperscript{18} It is worth noting that one of Ryle's (1945a) primary arguments for the irreducibility of knowing-how to knowing-that, borrowed from Lewis Carroll, concerned such reasoning abilities, rather than specifically practical skill.
The examples of perceptual and reasoning skills suggest that we should rather understand skills more generally as reliable, intelligent abilities simply to do things – where “doing things” can be understood as subsuming not only intentional action but at least seeings and thoughts, feelings and perhaps ‘volitions’ or ‘acts of will’. In that case, if commitment entails reliably taking action and exerting effort for the sake of a thing, it might be apt to be a ‘volitional skill’, a reliable, intelligent ability to will a thing.

Understanding volitional skill in this way, we can now ask whether, if the Success Claim is true, commitment is a volitional skill. If we hope to answer this question affirmatively, two initial claims must be met: (1) taking action for the sake of some X must entail acting intelligently, and (2) reliably taking action for the sake of X must entail possessing a reliable ability to take action for the sake of X. If these two criteria are met, then it will at least be true that if the Success Claim is true, commitment entails possession of a volitional skill. This on its own of course leaves us short of the claim that commitment is a volitional skill; but after arguing in the rest of the present section that these two criteria are met, I will argue in the next that we have good reason to think that the stronger claim is true as well.

First, then: Does taking action for the sake of some X entail acting intelligently? It may seem that the answer is ‘No’. For one can act for the sake of some X and act stupidly. For instance, X may be undeserving of such action, or one may have chosen the wrong action to perform for the sake of X. But the kind of intelligence necessary for exercising a skill is not that signified by distinguishing between “doing something intelligently” and “doing something stupidly” but, rather, that signified by distinguishing between “doing something intelligently” and “doing something non-intelligently” – or, better, between “doing something rationally” and doing some “a-rationally”. Acting intelligently, that is, in this sense, is a matter of doing something for a reason. This is reflected both in Ryle’s initial discussions of skill and know-how and in the ongoing discussions of those notions.19 Our first question, then, becomes the following: In taking action for the sake of some X, does one act for a reason? And the answer now seems straightforwardly to be ‘Yes’. For taking action ‘for the sake of X’ is taking action for the reason that the action in question is in the interest of X or is required by X. Action for the sake of X thus is intelligent in the required sense.

Second: Does reliably taking action for the sake of some X entail a reliable ability to take action for the sake of X? The answer here seems straightforwardly to be ‘Yes’. If one does a

19 See, e.g., Bengson & Moffett (2011b) on what they describe as the ‘intelligence/Intelligence’ distinction. It is rather the notion of ‘ability’ in the definition of a skill that accounts for correctness and, concomitantly, success.
thing non-accidentally, then one has the ability to do that thing. And if one reliably does a thing non-accidentally, one has a reliable ability to do that thing. One could certainly argue that an ability to take action is not truly reliable if one reliably takes action but for different reasons on different occasions. For instance, if I reliably play golf but I sometimes do so for charity, sometimes because the weather is nice, and sometimes because the local club has a sale on, we might consider my playing, in a sense, unreliable – charity golf tournaments, good weather, and club sales, after all, come and go. This doubt, however, is clearly inapplicable to the kind of reliability at issue in the Success Claim. For in reliably taking action for the sake of X, such action has a reliable reason. Reliably taking action for the sake of some X, then, does seem to entail possession of a reliable ability.

If the above is correct, then each of the criteria for a volitional skill is met; and, hence, if the Success Claim is true, commitment at least entails possession of a volitional skill – a reliable, intelligent ability to take action and exert effort for the sake of a thing. Again, however, this leaves us short of the claim that if the Success Claim is true, commitment is a volitional skill. In the next section, in evaluating the truth of the Success Claim itself, we will see that we have good reason to accept this stronger claim as well.

5.3 Commitment and Volitional Success

In this section, I ask whether the Success Claim is true and, in particular, whether it is true of the identity-defining form of commitment introduced in the previous chapter. Remember that the Success Claim initially attracted us because it seemed to answer a possible doubt about such commitment’s really being the key difference between virtue and (what we would now call) practical skill. The doubt concerned, more specifically, whether commitment could ensure the kind of stable and sufficient motivation to act well that is necessary for living a good life. In promising a form of commitment that entails a high degree of volitional success, the Success Claim thus promised a suitable form of commitment. It promised a form of commitment that entails both high stability and sufficient motivation. The aim here is to see whether and how the Success Claim is true of identity-defining commitment. If successful, we will both meet the challenge with which we began and show that such commitment is a volitional skill.

I start by returning to and briefly elaborating on identity-defining commitment. In doing so, I aim to bring out two respects in which it is identity-defining, reflecting its general strength and stability. I then turn to the challenge of showing that such commitment could be
strong and stable enough to entail a high degree of volitional success. In regard to both features, I argue that if the challenge is a conceptual one – viz., about what the concept identity-defining commitment allows – the challenge is in fact easily met. Given the constitutive aims of such commitment, paradigms or ideals of it will not just be stable and strong; they will be stable and strong enough, whatever may be required.\textsuperscript{20} I try to shed light on this fact by returning to the analogy with practical skills and by further appealing to our standard conception of commitment. The upshot will be that just as practical skill should be understood in terms of reliable practical success, so identity-defining commitment should be understood in terms of reliable volitional success, implying that such commitment does not merely entail possession of a volitional skill but, moreover, is a volitional skill.

In the previous chapter, we began to understand identity-defining commitment through a discussion of the good role-occupant’s commitment to their practice or characteristic activity, which they participate in because it is ‘what they do’. We see similar commitment as well in cases of commitment to individuals – such as in a good parent’s commitment to their child. There are two respects in which such commitment is identity-defining.

Firstly, the committed agent identifies with the object of their commitment. They see it not just as important or valuable but, moreover, as a deep part of their self. It is definitive of their identity, then, not in a passive way (as it is with the uncommitted parent, for instance) but in an active, first-personal way.\textsuperscript{21} To be committed in this sense is to value the object as an integral part of oneself. Such first-personal identification is plausibly what Bernard Williams has in mind when he talks of ‘really identifying oneself with objects outside of oneself’, as well as what Christine Korsgaard means when she talks of practical identities as ‘descriptions under which one values oneself’.\textsuperscript{22} This is a self-interpretative form of identification, a form of self-understanding, rather than a status one has merely in virtue of facts outside of oneself.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} That is, whatever is required that is humanly possible. It may not be humanly possible, for instance, to overcome certain kinds of addiction without help. In that case, though the addict may have lacked commitment on the way to forming the addiction, they may not lack it in the midst of the addiction.

\textsuperscript{21} Frankfurt (1988, 87) holds that the same is true of ‘care’.

\textsuperscript{22} Williams (1973); Korsgaard (2009, 101). Nietzsche (1878, §2.57) makes a similar point to Williams’s when he says that in morality, the person treats their self not as an individuum but as a dividuum – that is, as being divided amongst others and, hence, having parts of them as part of oneself as well. Nietzsche, however, uses this point polemically, rather than positively.

\textsuperscript{23} It is important that such self-interpretation needn’t be (and very often isn’t) explicit. See Blattner (1999, 81-82) for a discussion of ‘self-interpretation’ much in this vein.
And the second aspect is that the committed agent identifies with their *commitment* itself. This means at least that they endorse their being committed, but it also means more. It means that they *insist* on it. The committed agent is prepared to see to it that their commitment endures and is thus on the lookout for possible obstacles to or deterrents from it, and stands ready to oppose these.\(^{24}\) As Cheshire Calhoun has noted, this point adds a second sense in which commitment is ‘active’ rather than purely ‘passive’ or ‘non-voluntaristic’.\(^{25}\) The committed agent, then, in a sense, *chooses* their commitment. This needn’t mean that they invent or create it *ex nihilo*, nor that it is voluntaristic in the sense that they have simply *decided* to be committed. It simply means that their commitment is something on which they insist and look after.

Identity-defining commitment, then, has these two aspects: the object of commitment is definitive of the committed agent’s identity in the sense that the agent identifies with the object, and it is also definitive of their identity in that they identify with their commitment itself, insisting that it continues. I take it that both features make commitment strong and that especially the latter helps to explain its stability. In identifying with the object of commitment and one’s commitment itself, the committed agent is deeply committed; the object is not merely something that they enjoy or desire but, rather, something that they care deeply about, understanding it as a part of their self. And, similarly, in identifying with their commitment itself, the committed agent has its longevity as a task and is thus on the lookout for anything that might make it unstable.

It will be noted of course that neither of these features guarantees volitional success. One’s commitment being deep (a metaphor subsuming “strong”, I take it) does not guarantee that it will be deep enough to overcome contrary temptations. If it just so happens that all of

\(^{24}\) In discussing the similar ‘existential commitment’, Haugeland (1998b, 341) includes here ‘a readiness to insist on that which is constitutive of the commitment’s own possibility’. (This will be much like the commitment we saw Ryle manifest in Chapter 1, in being concerned with the foundations of philosophy.) As Haugeland emphasizes, however, such commitment needn’t entail dogmatism (as Calhoun (2009) worries). As an attempt at self- (and other-) understanding, such commitment is also on the lookout for its being a *mis*understanding. It is *risky*. On the riskiness of this (and related) forms of commitment, see also, e.g., Baier (1982), Dreyfus (1999), Frankfurt (2006), and Haugeland (2013). Holton (unpublished manuscript) notes in a related way of ‘strength of will’ that it ‘involves walking a fine line between weakness, on the one side, and stubbornness on the other.’

\(^{25}\) Calhoun (2009, 618) says this of what she calls ‘substantive commitment’. This is in the midst of a criticism of Schauber’s (1996) distinction between active and passive commitment. I think her criticism is too simplistic, as there is clearly a sense in which commitment (at least very often) *is* passive, something with which one first finds oneself and then insists on. Though the insistence might also come prior to the commitment. One can first insist on becoming committed and then find oneself committed. See, e.g., Murdoch’s (1970) case of M and D, and McManus’s (2018) related discussion.
the temptations in a person's life are extremely strong, for instance, even being deeply committed may be insufficient to make them reliable at acting for X's sake. And, on the side of stability, being on the lookout for what might make one's commitment unstable does not guarantee that it will last. If an individual is on the lookout for what might make their commitment unstable, but it just so happens that either they do not catch these things or else do not respond to them appropriately, their commitment will be unstable. These features of identity-defining commitment, then, on their own, can seem to fail to entail that such commitment is stable or strong enough to ensure good action. In which case identity-defining commitment would seem not to entail a high degree of volitional success.

In beginning to respond to these points, it can help to return to the relation between practical skill and practical success. In particular, it can help to remember that an individual can possess a practical skill but be unreliable in some circumstances. If I am practically skilled at doing backflips, for instance, that needn't mean that I can do one even when my feet are in concrete, or during an earthquake, or when I've had a lot to drink. If I am able to do a backflip in those circumstances, that does speak to my having a higher level of backflipping skill; but I can possess backflipping skill without possessing it to that (superhuman) level. There are different levels or degrees of practical skill. And, importantly, this does not keep practical skill from being understood in terms of reliable practical success. Again, to be practically skilled is to be reliably practically successful when one tries to perform the action-type in question ‘in some more less circumscribed set of circumstances’. A highly skilled individual will have practical success in wider circumstances, whereas the moderately skilled individual will have success in a narrower set of circumstances. The circumstances in which one reliably succeeds distinguish the moderately skilled performer from the expert, for instance.26

Returning to commitment, it seems that the things that might render an agent's commitment relatively weak can be thought of similarly. Temptations, for instance, seem to be circumstances much like those relevant to possession of a practical skill. For just as a skilled individual may be unable to do a backflip in an earthquake, so a committed individual may be unable to act for the sake of a thing in the face of great temptation. Such an agent will likely be understood as less committed than the agent who acts well in such circumstances.27 But as

26 I simplify the matter here, but it may be that there is no one dimension along which this can be measured and, hence, no simple way of measuring skill relative to context of success. Perhaps, for instance, one person will be able to do a backflip in an earthquake but not while their feet are in concrete, while another will have the opposite forms of ability and inability. It will not be a straightforward matter which is the more skilled.

27 I simplify the matter here as well (re: n. 26). As with practical skill, it may be that measuring commitment by reference to the circumstances in which an agent can resist temptation will not be straightforward. While one agent may be very
in the case of practical skill, this will not preclude their commitment from being understood in terms of reliable volitional success. The temptations which one can stand up to, for instance, will simply make for different levels of commitment. The more deeply committed an individual is, the more they will be able to overcome obstacles for the sake of the thing to which they are committed.

If this is acceptable, it first of all shows that the worry that identity-defining commitment may not be deep enough to overcome great temptations causes no problem for the project of showing that such commitment could serve as the key difference between virtue and practical skill. And the reason is that the worry is not a conceptual one. The concept of commitment (identity-defining or otherwise) admits of no in-principle upper bound, just as the concept of a practical skill admits of no in-principle upper bound. So, for any form of temptation, there will be a suitable form of commitment to overcome it. The worry that commitment may not be deep enough to overcome great temptation, then, could only be a psychological one – a worry that human beings are not capable of the kind of commitment required for overcoming greater and greater temptation. But this is not a worry for the view I am defending here.

This response is concomitant as well with a more general point about commitment. We saw in §5.1 that a constitutive aim of commitment is doing what is in fact for the sake of that to which one is committed. And we saw it follow that ideal forms of commitment will be those in which the committed agent does do what is in fact for the sake of the object of commitment, rather than what is merely taken to be for their sake. It also follows from this that ideal forms of commitment will be those in which the committed agent reliably does what is for the sake of the thing to which they are committed – that is, in which they take action and exert effort for its sake, rather than not doing so. For it is a constitutive aim of commitment to act for the sake of that to which one is committed. The highest levels of commitment, then – for which there is in principle no upper bound – will be those in which the agent has sufficiently strong motivation to act for the sake of the thing to which they are committed.

Further, what we see in the analogy with practical skill and in this more general point about ideal forms of commitment, is that it is quite natural to talk of commitment not just as good at resisting temptations of one kind, another may be good at resisting temptations of another kind; and there may be no straightforward ways of measuring these against each other. This is unimportant, however, for the general point that I go on to make.
entailing volitional success but in terms of such success. In the analogy with practical skill, we found it natural to talk of being committed as being situated so as to succeed at overcoming certain kinds of temptation, and hence as being suitably motivated to act well, at least in certain circumstances. And in discussing ideal forms of commitment, we have similarly found it natural to understand these in terms of reliable volitional success. These points draw the notion of commitment closer to the notion of a volitional skill than we were able to do in the previous section. There we saw that if the Success Claim is true, then commitment entails possession of a volitional skill; but in understanding commitment in terms of volitional success, we see that it plausibly is a kind of volitional skill – a kind of reliable, intelligent ability to take action and exert effort for the sake of a thing, which admits of higher and lower levels, just as a practical skill does.

We still, however, have to address the worry that identity-defining commitment may be insufficiently stable. The worry, again, was that though we have described the committed agent as necessarily ‘on the lookout’ for what would make their commitment unstable, merely being on the lookout does not guarantee that it will be stable and continue, since an agent could do so and yet fail to identify the deterrents or fail to respond to them appropriately, leading to the gradual waning of their commitment. A similar response as above, however, is available here as well. That the committed agent is on the lookout for what might make their commitment unstable means that identity-defining commitment constitutively aims at noticing these things and responding appropriately. That is, such commitment has continuing as a constitutive aim. And that means that ideals of such commitment are those that do continue – they are those that are stable enough – even, then, for living a good life.

That ideal forms of commitment continue can sound in one respect counterintuitive, but it is also common sense. It can sound counterintuitive because an agent’s commitment does not seem impugned if they do not know what things might get in the way of their commitment, or do not know how to respond to these things when they do spot them. Indeed, it seems that such an agent might be as motivated as you like and still not be able to spot or respond appropriately to such things. And yet, on the other hand, it is common sense that paradigms of commitment are those that last, those in which the agent continues to see the object of their commitment as valuable or important and in which they continue to act for its sake.

Both points are of course perfectly compatible with the view that ideal forms of commitment last. As with false beliefs, the agent who does not know what things might get in
the way of their commitment, or does not know how to respond to these things when they do spot them, can still count as committed, just non-ideally. Such an individual may be as committed as they can be, given their present epistemic and other limitations, but they are less capable of commitment than some others. Commitment, in this ideal sense, means sticking with it; it is not a mere feeling. So commitment that does not stick with it is non-ideal simply as commitment. Ideal forms of identity-defining commitment, then, are not only forms of volitional skill, they are also suited to explain the key features of virtue that set it apart from practical skill – that virtue involves sufficient motivation to act well and that it is stable enough to last a lifetime.

5.4 Conclusion

Where does this leave us as to the question of whether virtue is a kind of skill? In concluding here, I confine myself to discussing where this leaves us as to Ryle’s late arguments to the effect that virtue is not a skill, as well as his late arguments that virtue is not a kind of knowledge.

We saw in Chapter 1 that Ryle’s early writings are optimistic about virtue being a skill, that in The Concept of Mind (1949) he has become more hesitant, and that by the time of ‘On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong’ (1958), though he still holds that virtue is a kind of knowledge, he has given up on the view that it is a skill. In that later paper, his main argument against virtue being a skill is that virtue constitutively requires caring about acting well, whereas skill (or what he sometimes calls ‘technical knowledge’) does not. He claims that virtue, like skill, does require knowing how to act well, but whereas virtue constitutively requires caring about acting well, the ‘person who has received [mere] technical instruction…may, but may not, owe to his instructor a second debt of gratitude for having taught him also to enjoy [the activity]’. And, further, he claims that ‘[l]earning to enjoy…is not acquiring a skill…” Ryle’s argument here is essentially one of Aristotle’s, then, that virtue requires acting well ‘for its own sake’, whereas skill does not – though Ryle explicitly adds that this extra feature of virtue is not itself a skill.

In the present chapter, we have seen that we have good reason to doubt this line of argument, because at least some kinds of commitment are skills. The above argument of 1958 thus gives us no reason to think that virtue is not itself a kind of skill. We have agreed with

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28 It may nonetheless be a mental state, if one accepts Williamson’s (2000) notion of a mental state.
29 Ryle (1958, 385; emphasis added)
Ryle and Aristotle that the practically skilled agent needn’t be committed to exercising their skill or to exercising it well, but we have also seen that identity-defining commitment is itself a skill. Much like Ryle argued of knowledge in 1958, then, (when he claimed that that notion is ‘ampler…than our academic epistemologies have acknowledged’30), so here I have argued that skill is an ampler notion than he acknowledged. Like many others, Ryle treats technical knowledge merely as something stored up, as something that can be used as one pleases, but I have argued that technē can mean more.31 Reliability at acting for the sake of a thing can also be a skill.

What, though, about Ryle’s more specific argument that care cannot be a kind of knowledge (hence, not a kind of skill) because it doesn’t make sense to speak of cares as being ‘forgotten’?32 As this argument has received some attention of late, a full response to it would deserve its own discussion.33 I address it here only briefly. I think that the kind of identity-defining commitment in which I have been interested helps to meet this objection as well. For, first, Ryle claims that skills can be forgotten.34 So if identity-defining commitment is a skill, he seems committed to admitting that such commitment can be forgotten as well. But, further, and more directly to his argument, such commitment plausibly can be forgotten. To see this, remember that identity-defining commitment is not just a matter of what one enjoys or plans to do but of ‘who one is’ and ‘what one does’. And we do speak of forgetting such things. The politician who begins their career committed to helping the poor, but becomes corrupt, has forgotten ‘who they are’. They were the politician of the people, say, but they no longer reliably act for the sake of the people. They may even, in a moment of realization, admit this to themselves – lamenting what they’ve become. Similarly, a parent who starts out devoted to their children, but comes to give all of their time to their career, may in a sense have forgotten ‘what a parent does’. Though they set out to be a good parent, they have forgotten that part of themselves. We can, in that case, forget identity-defining commitment. Ryle’s more specific

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30 Ryle (1958, 385)
31 This is a theme in some of Heidegger’s work, though I don’t claim to know precisely what he has in mind. He claims, for instance, in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ that ‘From the earliest times until Plato the word technē is linked with the word epistēmē. Both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand…’ (Heidegger 1977, 13). At this point in the essay, he is attempting to disentangle technē from the common ‘mere means’-understanding that we have of “technology”.
32 He makes this objection not only in the 1958 paper but also in the 1972 paper ‘Can virtue be taught?’
33 See, again, McGrath (2015) and Cowan (unpublished manuscript).
34 Ryle (1958, 382-383)
objection to thinking of care as a kind of skill, then, is met. And this keeps it from being an objection to thinking of virtue as a kind of skill, as well.\textsuperscript{35}

Finally, consider Ryle's main argument against thinking of virtue as a kind of knowledge from his ‘Can virtue be taught?’ (1972). By this time, he is firmly convinced that virtue is not a skill. But any argument against virtue being a kind of knowledge will also be an argument against it being a kind of skill. He presents this argument, as we have seen, as follows:

[Virtue] does not very comfortably wear the label of “knowledge” at all, since it is to be honourable [for instance], and not only or primarily to be knowledgeable about or efficient at anything… Where Socrates was at fault was, I think, that he assumed that if virtue can be learned, then here, as elsewhere, the learning terminates in knowing. But here the learning terminates in being so-and-so, and only derivatively from this in knowing so-and-so – in an improvement of one’s heart, and only derivatively from this in an improvement in one’s head as well. (Ryle 1972, 444)

We found this argument confusing in Chapter 1 because it conflicts with earlier claims in the same paper – viz., concerning whether care is or is not (sometimes) a kind of knowledge. But here we can take the passage at face value. The argument is that virtue is not a kind of knowledge because it amounts to being something, rather than merely knowing something.

In response, we could perhaps simply offer the example of being smart, for instance, which plausibly is just a matter of knowing something. ‘Being something’, that is, can be a kind of ‘knowing something’. But Ryle’s point in contrasting ‘being’ with ‘knowing’ is clearly that virtue is a matter of the whole agent, something that they are, rather than merely possess. And being smart may not be a matter of ‘the whole agent’, in this sense. The notion of identity-defining commitment, however, seems well-suited to account for this point. For such commitment is not something that one merely possesses; it is something that one is, deeply. In Ryle’s terms, it is a state of one’s heart, but that does not keep it from being a sort of knowledge. For we have argued that it is also a kind of skill. And if Ryle is correct that this state of one’s heart is basic to virtue, it will be well-suited to explain why virtue consists of being something.

The conclusion, of course, is not that virtue is a kind of practical skill, nor that it is commitment – hence, a kind of volitional skill – but, rather, that it consists of both of these. The agent who knows how to live well in the sense of possessing a practical skill, has the knowledge necessary to live well were they committed to doing so. And the agent who knows

\textsuperscript{35} Remember that Aristotle’s point was not quite Ryle’s. Aristotle held simply that it’s very difficult to forget virtue; and the idea of identity-defining commitment we have been discussing certainly explains why that would be.
how to live well, in the sense of also being committed to living well, has stable and sufficient motivation to do so. They thus reliably do what they know how to do – they in fact live well.
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