

Knowledge as a Capacity: Ryle and Cook Wilson

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1. Introduction

Is factual knowledge a capacity? Or is it rather something categorical, perhaps a qualitative state, event, or activity? If factual knowledge is a capacity, then there must be an answer to a second question: what, most fundamentally, does possession of that capacity enable? What are its characteristic exercises or actualizations? This chapter considers a proposal about the answers to these questions that Gilbert Ryle sketches in *The Concept of Mind* (1949). According to Ryle, factual knowledge is a certain sort of capacity to bring things off or get things right. Specifically, it is a capacity to act or react in the light of what one knows. Our focus will be on an apparent disagreement between this view of Ryle's and the views of one of his Oxford predecessors, John Cook Wilson.²

According to Cook Wilson, factual knowing, or what he calls "apprehending," is most fundamentally an occurrent shaping of consciousness. Indeed, Cook Wilson sometimes characterizes these acts or states using a continuous form of the verb 'knows'. For example, he writes that "the process of reasoning is precisely the activity of knowing" (Cook Wilson 1926: 35). Now what we more ordinarily talk about when we talk about factual knowing is something non-occurrent which we take to be preservable through periods of unconsciousness. We can think of this as *standing* knowing. Standing knowing, according to Cook Wilson, is a capacity. Specifically, it is a capacity to enjoy occurrent knowing or apprehending. So, Cook Wilson holds that standing factual knowledge is a capacity. And he offers a seemingly clear and straightforward view about its characteristic manifestations: standing knowing is a capacity for occurrent knowing or apprehending.

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² Cook Wilson (1849–1915) was Wykeham Professor of Logic 1889–1915. Ryle (1900–1976) was Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy 1945–1967.

Ryle agrees with Cook Wilson that factual knowledge is a capacity (see, e.g., Ryle 1949: 117). However, Ryle disagrees with Cook Wilson's answer to the second question, seemingly denying that there is such a thing as occurrent knowing:

Dispositional words like 'know'...are determinable dispositional words. They signify abilities, tendencies or pronenesses to do, not things of one unique kind, but things of lots of different kinds. Theorists who recognise that 'know' and 'believe' are commonly used as dispositional verbs are apt not to notice this point, but to assume that there must be corresponding acts of knowing or apprehending and states of believing; and the fact that one person can never find another person executing such wrongly postulated acts, or being in such states is apt to be accounted for by locating these acts and states inside the agent's secret grotto (Ryle 1949: 102–3).

What Ryle writes here might suggest that he views a piece of knowledge not as a single capacity, which we would expect to have a unified form of characteristic manifestation, but rather as a congeries of different capacities.³ However, following John Hyman (1999) and Michael Kremer (2016, 2025), we can read Ryle as proposing that knowledge is unified by being a kind of *adverbial* capacity, a capacity not to do specific things or to be specific ways, but rather to do whatever one does, or to be however one is, in a specific manner, namely, in the light of the facts. This positive proposal does not mention, and so threatens to make superfluous, Cook Wilson's appeal to occurrent knowing or apprehension.

The questions animating this chapter concern whether that threat is realized. More specifically, our first question is whether the capacity to which Ryle's proposal appeals excludes, is independent of, or rather depends upon, occurrent knowing or apprehension. Here, I shall suggest that Ryle's proposal does not exclude a role for occurrent knowing or apprehension. Our second question is whether Ryle presents any reasons that favour his proposal over Cook Wilson's. Here, I shall draw on a suggestion of Aristotle's to suggest that he does not.

§2 outlines two relevant elements in Cook Wilson's thinking about factual knowledge. §3 develops a way of understanding Ryle's view that knowing is an adverbial capacity. §4 offers a preliminary evaluation of the disagreement between Ryle and Cook Wilson, a disagreement which I think warrants further critical attention.

2. *Cook Wilson on knowledge as a capacity for apprehension*

In a paper Ryle read to the Oxford Philosophical Society in 1968, he makes the following comments about his early philosophical development:

So far my motivation was that of a would-be antibiotic epistemologist. 'Fidgetty [*sic*] Cook-Wilsonian' would, so far, have been a fair title for me.... (Ryle 1993b: 106)

The central point of interest here is Ryle's qualified description of his earlier self as a Cook Wilsonian. Of secondary interest is Ryle's qualification, evincing restlessness in that role. We will shortly consider some ways in which Ryle's restlessness expressed itself in 1949. The hope

³ Geach 1957: 8–9 raises a worry of this sort.

is that we might learn something about Ryle's views and their development by considering ways in which they align with or depart from Cook Wilson's.⁴ Before returning to Ryle, it will be helpful to say a little more about two important elements in Cook Wilson's thinking about knowledge.⁵

The first element is Cook Wilson's appeal to apprehension as the active or occurrent form of knowing. Cook Wilson's single-minded focus on apprehension means that he is not very explicit about its relations to standing knowing. It is therefore helpful to consider a summary by one of his younger contemporaries, Richard Robinson, from a book length defence of Cook Wilson's philosophy:

In connexion with knowledge Cook Wilson has the term 'apprehension' and its relatives. By this term he refers precisely to the fact of knowledge. But yet it is not quite a synonym for 'knowledge'. For by the verb 'to know' we usually refer to the possession of knowledge in general, and not to a particular realization of our knowledge. We say of a man that he knows geometry, not meaning that he is thinking of it at this moment, but that he has learnt the facts of geometry and can think of them when he wishes. By the verb 'to apprehend', on the other hand, Cook Wilson usually refers not to the possession of knowledge in general but to the particular act of attending to and knowing something. Lt.-Col. Farquharson says that Cook Wilson appears to use 'apprehension' as equivalent to Aristotle's [*noesis*].^[Footnote omitted⁶] [*Noesis*] is the realization of the faculty [*noûs*]. [*Noûs*] is knowledge, and thus [*noesis*] is exactly 'apprehension'. (Robinson 1931: 8–9. See also 245–248.)

According to Robinson (and Farquharson), Cook Wilson followed Aristotle in treating standing knowledge as a capacity for apprehension. Central here is the structural proposal that standing knowledge is a capacity for a special form of conscious occurrence, "a particular act of knowing something" (Robinson 1931: 8).

Aristotle varies his characterisations of the operative form of conscious occurrence to include *theoria* or contemplation as well as *noesis* or apprehension, but the following passage from *De Anima* is illustrative:

In the first case, something is a knower in the way in which we might say that a human knows because humans belong to the class of knowers and to those things which have knowledge; but in the second case, we say directly that the one who has grammatical knowledge knows. These are not in the same way potential knowers; instead, the first one because his genus and matter are of a certain sort, and the other because he has the potential to contemplate whensoever he wishes, so long as nothing external hinders him. Yet another sort of knower is the one already contemplating. (Aristotle, *De Anima*: II.5 417a 22–30)

⁴ For discussion of some ways in which Ryle's work reflected the influence of Cook Wilson, see Kremer 2025 and Longworth ms. Cook Wilson's influence is especially prominent in Ryle 1930 and 1932, but it is also visible in other works, including, for example, Ryle 1945 and 1949.

⁵ This account of Cook Wilson's views includes material from Longworth ms. For detailed discussion of Cook Wilson's account of knowledge, see Longworth and Wimmer 2022a, 2022b, Marion 2000a, 2000b, Robinson 1931, Travis and Calderon 2013.

⁶ The omitted footnote is a reference to Farquharson's editorial footnote, Cook Wilson 1926: 78.

Someone with standing knowledge thereby has a capacity to apprehend or contemplate, whensoever they wish. An active knower is one who is already apprehending or contemplating.⁷

The second relevant element is Cook Wilson's conception of apprehension. Although standing knowledge is to be characterised by appeal to apprehension, Cook Wilson treats apprehension itself as fundamental:

...the judgement of knowledge, or other such act of knowing, is such apprehension. Apprehension itself is obviously ultimate. Everything we can say about it, or indeed about anything else, presupposes it; it is futile therefore and a mere fallacy to profess to explain the act of apprehension. (Cook Wilson 1926: 279)

Similarly, Cook Wilson writes:

Perhaps most fallacies in the theory of knowledge are reduced to the primary one of trying to *explain* the nature of knowing or apprehending. We cannot *construct knowing*—the act of apprehending—out of any elements. (Cook Wilson 1926: 803)

To a good approximation, apprehending a fact, as Cook Wilson understands it, is being consciously aware of that fact. Three aspects of Cook Wilson's view are of especial importance in what follows. First, apprehension, like being consciously aware that *p*, is a mental occurrence. Second, apprehension is not decomposable into elements and so is not decomposable into a strictly mental element together with non-mental elements. And third, apprehending, like knowing or being consciously aware that *p*, is *factive*, so that one cannot apprehend that *p* unless it is a fact that *p*. Apprehension is a kind of mental occurrence that is constitutively dependent on relevant facts. For example, my apprehending, or being consciously aware, that Ryle was born in 1900 is constitutively dependent on the fact that Ryle *was* born in 1900.

3. *Ryle on knowledge as a capacity for operating with reasons*

Ryle begins to outline his account of knowledge, and in particular the way it differs from belief, in the following passage:

Epistemologists are apt to perplex themselves and their readers over the distinction between knowledge and belief. Some of them suggest that these differ only in degree of something or other, and some that they differ in the presence of some introspectable ingredient in knowing which is absent from believing, or vice versa. Part of this embarrassment is due to their supposing that 'know' and 'believe' signify occurrences, but even when it is seen that both are dispositional verbs, it has still to be seen that they are dispositional verbs of quite disparate types. 'Know' is a capacity verb, and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off, or get things right. 'Believe', on the other hand, is a tendency verb and one that does not connote that anything is brought off or got right. (Ryle 1949: 128)

⁷ For relevant discussion of Aristotle's thinking about activity or actuality and its relation to potentiality, see his *Metaphysics* Θ.

There is a hint here of Ryle's scepticism about Cook Wilson's idea that 'know' can signify occurrences. More important, though, is Ryle's positive proposal, which is not immediately transparent. The following presents one way of understanding his proposal.⁸

There are some dispositions the *primary* or most fundamental exercises of which are sometimes successes or achievements and sometimes are not. These manifestations are sometimes cases of bringing something off or getting something right and sometimes not. One sort of example would be one form of disposition to tell people something. The relevant success in this case would be telling someone something *true* and so telling them *correctly*. Where one tells a person something correctly, one gets something right, namely, telling them something correctly. However, since the operative disposition is to tell someone something, rather than to tell someone something correctly, one's success is not explained just by appeal to one's disposition. At best, the operative disposition is to tell people something correct *if* what one says is true. Thus, someone with only this disposition has at most a *tendency* to get telling right: they will *tend* to get telling right insofar as there happens to be a match between how they say things are and how things in fact are. According to Ryle, believing is a disposition of this sort: one with this tendency will exercise it in doing things that will meet operative conditions for success only insofar as circumstantial factors without the control of the disposition play their required role in securing those conditions. In short, success is only a *secondary* manifestation of this sort of disposition.

By contrast, there are some dispositions the primary exercises of which are successes or achievements. Where someone possesses a disposition of this sort, it is no accident, given their disposition, that they succeed as they do. Since the primary manifestation of their disposition is success, their success is explained by their possession of that disposition. One sort of example would be another form of disposition to tell people something, a disposition to tell someone something because it is true. This would be a disposition to tell someone something correctly. Thus, someone with this disposition is disposed to get telling right: they do not merely *tend* to get telling right if suitable circumstances obtain; rather, they get telling right as a matter of *capacity*. According to Ryle, knowing is a disposition of this sort: someone with this capacity will exercise it in doing things that meet operative conditions for success. In short, success is the *primary* manifestation of this sort of disposition. We can see this conception at work in the following passage:

When we use, as we often do use, the phrase 'can tell' as a paraphrase of 'know', we mean by 'tell', 'tell correctly'. We do not say that a child can tell the time, when all that he does is deliver random time-of-day statements, but only when he regularly reports the time of day in conformity with the position of the hands of the clock, or with the position of the sun, whatever these positions may be. (Ryle 1949: 130)⁹

Given this way of understanding Ryle's position, we can see that knowledge cannot be a capacity *simply* to get things right, that there must be a more fundamental characterisation of the manifestations of this capacity. For one's possession of a capacity to get things right must

⁸ The proposed interpretation includes and develops material in Longworth ms.

⁹ For helpful discussion of Ryle's proposal to this point, see Kremer 2016, 2025, Scheffler 1968.

be able to explain one's getting things right. And yet one's getting things right depends not only on one's intrinsic features, but also on the facts. So, one's capacity to get things right must be able to explain a sort of alignment between one's intrinsic features and relevant facts. But to explain the required sort of alignment, the capacity's exercises must either be appropriately determined by the relevant facts or appropriately determinative of those facts. And again, the capacity itself must explain that alignment. It seems, then, that for the capacity to explain such an alignment, it must be partly constituted by a relation to relevant facts. To avoid regress, it must either be constitutively determined by the facts, or be constitutively determinative of the facts, or both. And now given that a capacity is determined by its primary manifestations, the required constitutive relation must be reflected in the primary manifestations of the target capacity: the primary manifestations of the capacity must themselves be in constitutive relation with the facts. As we noted in §2, apprehension meets that condition. We will now consider whether and how the kinds of primary manifestations of knowledge that are favoured by Ryle also do so.

Ryle's account of the primary manifestations of knowledge emerges most fully, although still partly submerged, in the following passage.

A person who knows that the ice is thin, and also cares whether it is thin or thick, will, of course be apt to act and react in [ways characteristic of one who only believes]. But to say that he keeps to the edge, because he knows that the ice is thin, is to employ a quite different sense of 'because', or to give a quite different sort of 'explanation', from that conveyed by saying that he keeps to the edge because he believes that the ice is thin. (Ryle 1949: 118)

We can begin to unpack this passage by noting a distinction amongst kinds of reasons explanations—explanations *why*—between what we can think of as *internal* and *external* such explanations.

Consider (1):

- (1) Edmund stops skating because he is drunk.

Here, one natural understanding is that Edmund's behaviour is, in a sense, explained directly by a fact about their circumstances: Edmund is incapacitated by drunkenness. Whatever Edmund thinks, knows, or wants, is not relevant to this explanation. And the explanation can be correct only if Edmund *is* drunk: it is a *factive* explanation. This would be an *external* reasons explanation.

Now consider (2):

- (2) Edmund keeps to the edge because the middle has thawed.

This example again admits being understood as an external reasons explanation: Edmund cannot skate in the middle because there is no ice there. However, (2) also admits of an understanding on which Edmund is said to keep to the edge *for the reason that*, or *in the light of the fact that*, the middle has thawed. (Having seen this, we can see that (1) also admits of such an understanding, on which Edmund knows that he is drunk and stops skating for that reason.) This would be an *internal* reasons explanation. Like an external reasons explanation,

this is a factive explanation, one that can be correct only if the middle *has* thawed. But it is plausible that internal reasons explanations must meet an additional demand, that Edmund must also *know* that the middle has thawed.

We can begin to see the plausibility of this additional demand by reflection on examples like the following one, due to Jennifer Hornsby:

The example concerns Edmund who believes that the ice in the middle of the pond is dangerously thin, having been told so by a normally reliable friend, and who accordingly keeps to the edge. But Edmund’s friend didn’t want Edmund to skate in the middle of the pond (never mind why), so that he had told Edmund that the ice there was thin despite having no view about whether or not it actually was thin. Edmund, then, did not keep to the edge *because* the ice in the middle was thin. Suppose now that, as it happened, the ice in the middle of the pond was thin. This makes no difference. Edmund still didn’t keep to the edge *because* the ice was thin. (Hornsby 2008: 251.)

Reflection on an array of such examples supports the following condition:

Light: Necessarily, wherever someone does something—or, generalizing, wherever someone does, thinks, or feels something—because *p*, and where they do this in the light of the fact that *p* so that this is an internal reasons explanation, one involving internal-because, their doing so in this way depends upon their knowing that *p*.¹⁰

Given *Light*, wherever we have a correct explanation of the form, “At *t*, *S* did, thought, or felt something internal-because *p*,” it will follow that at *t*, *S* knew that *p*. It is therefore natural to allow that wherever we have such an explanation, we will also have a corresponding explanation of the following form: “*S* did, thought, or felt something because *S* knew that *p*.” We can thus connect *Light*, and its role in internal reasons explanations, with what Ryle writes in the target passage. Understood in this way, Ryle’s proposal—that to say that Edmund “keeps to the edge, because *he knows that the ice is thin*, is to employ a quite different sense of ‘because’, or to give a quite different sort of ‘explanation’”—points to the way that knowledge figures in underpinning a special sort of explanation, an internal reasons explanation. This way of understanding the passage is proposed by John Hyman (1999: 446) and then developed and supported by Michael Kremer (2016, 2025).

Although I agree with Hyman and Kremer that this is the best way to understand Ryle’s thought in the target passage, the sailing here is not completely plain. For although it seems plausible that where we have that *S* did something internal-because *p*, we will also have that *S* did it because they knew that *p*, Ryle mentions only the latter. For it to be plain that Ryle meant also to endorse the distinctiveness of internal reasons explanations, and thought that this was captured by the knowledge-involving formulation, we would need to suppose that Ryle also endorsed the converse claim, that wherever it is true that *S* did something because they knew

¹⁰ Contemporary recognition of this condition and its importance is due mainly to John Hyman 1999. See also his 2006, 2015: 159–190. For further defences see, e.g., Alvarez 2010; Hawthorne and Magidor 2018; Hornsby 2008; Littlejohn 2018; McDowell 2013; Neta 2009; Raz 2002; Unger 1975; Williams 1972; Williamson 2000: 184–208. The condition is assumed in Moore 1905–6 and Prichard 1932, an important proponent of many aspects of Cook Wilson’s views. We can see a hint of the condition in Cook Wilson’s claim, cited above, that “the process of reasoning is precisely the activity of knowing” (Cook Wilson 1926: 35).

that p , there is also a true internal reasons explanation according to which S did it because p . And not only do we lack evidence that Ryle endorsed that claim, but the claim itself also lacks plausibility.

We can see this by comparing the internal reasons explanations understanding of (2) with different ways of understanding (3):

(3) Edmund keeps to the edge because they believe that the middle has thawed.

This example can be understood as presenting a correct internal reasons explanation. However, that is so only if *Light* is met, so that Edmund *knows that* they believe that the middle has thawed. In that case, but only in that case, Edmund keeps to the edge in the light of a fact, namely, the fact that *they believe that the middle has thawed*. The alternative understanding is an *external* reasons explanation, according to which the fact that Edmund believes that the middle has thawed *directly* explains their keeping to the edge without the explanation running via a reason for which Edmund keeps to the edge. It is natural to suppose that where Edmund believes that the middle has thawed, it seems to Edmund that the middle has thawed. It is also natural to think that in cases in which Edmund act on this belief by keeping to the edge, it also seems to them that they are keeping to the edge internal-because the middle has thawed. Still, things merely seem that way to Edmund. Edmund's belief figures in explaining their behaviour in much the way that other facts outside their ken, including the fact that the middle is cordoned off, can explain their behaviour.¹¹

Now consider (4):

(4) Edmund keeps to the edge because they know that the middle has thawed.

Here, the same alternatives are available, but with a twist. If Edmund *knows that* they know that the middle is thawed, then they might be able to keep to the edge for that reason, namely, because they know that the middle is thawed. But a more natural understanding of (4) is as presenting, like (3), an external reasons explanation. The twist is that some though not all the ways in which Edmund's knowledge figures in explaining their behaviour depend upon the factiveness of knowledge, that Edmund's knowing that the middle has thawed guarantees that it *has* thawed. Because the factiveness of knowledge figures in this way, there is a plausible entailment from (4) to (2), akin to the plausible entailment from (2), on its internal reasons explanations understanding, to (4). However, the transition from (4) to (2) holds only with respect to the *external* reasons explanation understanding of (2) and so fails to connect (4) to the target internal reasons explanation. On no understanding of (4) does its truth ensure that Edmund keeps to the edge *internal-because* the middle has thawed.

¹¹ Some issues in this area are plausibly connected with Ryle's (1949: 116–118) discussion of ways in which believing, by contrast with knowing, admits of external reasons explanation. One aspect of the connection is that because knowing that p is partly constituted by the fact that p , one cannot explain why someone knows that p by claiming that they know p because p . Another aspect is that there is anyway no need for such an explanation, because the complete exercise of their capacity to know includes the fact that p without the need for further internal or external explanations, of the sort that are offered when we say that someone believes that p only because they are credulous, obstinate, and so on.

Returning to the interpretation of Ryle's view suggested by Hyman (1999: 446) and developed and defended by Kremer (2016, 2025), its central claim is that the primary manifestations of knowledge that *p* are cases in which the knower acts, thinks, or feels something *internal-because p*.¹² Knowledge is thus viewed as an *adverbial* capacity, a capacity the primary or characteristic manifestations of which are *ways* in which other capacities are manifested—specifically, the way in which other capacities are manifested when they are manifested in the light of the fact that *p*. We are now positioned to see that Ryle agrees with Cook Wilson in viewing the primary manifestations of factual knowledge as depending constitutively on relevant facts. Cook Wilson takes this view because he views those primary manifestations as cases of apprehension, a *specific* kind of factive occurrence. Ryle takes the view, by contrast, because he views the primary manifestations of knowledge not as cases of any specific kinds of occurrences, but rather as cases of factive *ways* in which specific kinds of occurrences occur.

4. Ryle contra Cook Wilson

Let us turn now to the preliminary evaluation of Ryle's claim about the characteristic manifestations of knowledge. Our focus will be on a comparison with Cook Wilson's view and, specifically, on the two questions mentioned earlier, whether there is a place for apprehension in a view like Ryle's and whether Ryle supplies reasons favouring his view over Cook Wilson's.

It is important in addressing these questions to see that Cook Wilson has no need to deny that one who knows has the capacity that Ryle characterises. His two central claims are these. First, that insofar as one who knows has that capacity, their having a capacity to apprehend is integral to it. Second, that knowledge itself, by contrast with the wider range of capacities that knowledge supports and that are normally also possessed by one who knows, is *just* a capacity to apprehend. The primary manifestation of knowing that *p* is apprehending that *p* rather than acting, thinking, or feeling internal-because *p*.

To see more clearly what space is available to Cook Wilson, it will be helpful to have before us the outline of a Cook-Wilsonian counterproposal to Ryle's about the place of knowledge in enabling acting or reacting for reasons. Aristotle (as reported by Iamblichus) offers a helpful sketch of a proposal of this sort:

This knowledge is indeed contemplative, but it enables us to frame all our practice in accordance with it. For just as sight makes and shapes nothing (since its only work is to judge and to show us everything than [*sic*] can be seen), yet it enables us to act as it directs and gives us the greatest assistance towards action (for we should be almost entirely motionless if deprived of it), so it is clear that, though knowledge is contemplative, yet we do innumerable things in accordance with it, choose some things and avoid others, and in general gain as a result of it everything that is good. (Aristotle, *Protrepticus* B51.)

Part of Aristotle's thought is that sight is a capacity to see, rather than a capacity to act in ways that are appropriately sensitive to what is visible. Nonetheless, one who sees is thereby (normally) enabled to act in ways that are sensitive to what is visible, for they have capacities

¹² Hyman presents a version of this proposal about knowledge *in propria persona* in the works cited in fn.7.

to act the exercises of which are sensitive to the deliverances of sight. With respect to factual knowledge, his thought is that this is indeed contemplative, in the sense that its primary manifestation is apprehension or contemplation rather than action. Nonetheless, one who knows is thereby (normally) enabled to act in ways that are sensitive to what is known. Expanding slightly, Aristotle's thought is to this effect. Those who have knowledge also (normally) have capacities not only to act, but to act for, or in accord with, reasons. Someone's capacity to do something for reasons is a capacity to do it in the light of any facts they have the capacity to contemplate or to bring to conscious awareness. Knowing that *p* is a capacity to contemplate or to bring to conscious awareness the fact that *p* and so to make that fact available to the capacity to do things for reasons. Generalising slightly, the proposal is that human beings normally have capacities to act, think, or feel for any reasons that are available to them. Those capacities are distinct from, but integrated with, their factual knowledge, the system of capacities which makes various reasons available to them: capacities to contemplate, to bring to conscious awareness, or to apprehend various facts.¹³

Now just as Cook Wilson need not deny that knowledge figures in exercises of the capacity to act, think, or feel for reasons, the proponent of a position like Ryle's can allow a role for apprehension in such exercises.¹⁴ The core of their disagreement is that Cook Wilson holds, while Ryle denies, that knowledge is *fully* exercised in apprehension. But are there any positive reasons to think that apprehension does figure in our operating with reasons?

We can see a plausible role for apprehension here by considering that all of what we know does not figure all at once in furnishing reasons for what we do, think, or feel. Not only does not all our knowledge figure in any specific case of our operating with reasons. Some of our knowledge cannot figure for more-or-less extended periods, because we are sometimes unable to recollect or actively remember some of what we know. Merely knowing that *p* while acting, thinking, or feeling does not suffice for acting, thinking, or feeling in the light of the fact that *p*. And that is so whether we are acting, thinking, or feeling in accord with the fact that *p* or we are acting, thinking, or feeling in ways that it would have been beneficial to bring into accord with that fact. If it is to underwrite internal reasons explanations, a piece of knowledge must not only be possessed but must also be exercised.

Furthermore, we seem able to bring facts to conscious awareness through recollecting or actively remembering them, regardless of whether they are pertinent to what we are there and then doing, thinking, or feeling. And the very same capacity to bring facts to conscious

¹³ Because of this point of symmetry between Cook Wilson's position and Ryle's, we should not expect either side to be able to score an easy victory by presenting counterexamples. In particular, insofar as Cook Wilson's position is consistent with there being a normal, or even a necessary, connection between possession of a capacity to apprehend and possession of a capacity to act, think, or feel for reasons, we should not expect to see (normal) examples of subject's who can apprehend that *p* but cannot act, think, or feel in light of the fact that *p*. For putative counterexamples, see Williamson 2018 and the attempted rebuttals in Hyman 2018.

¹⁴ As was mentioned earlier, Ryle 1949 does sometimes seem to deny any such role for apprehension. The present point is just that the proposal about knowing that we are considering is consistent with allowing it a role. However, as discussed in Longworth ms, Ryle's settled attitude towards apprehension is not straightforward to discern. Relevant here are Ryle's discussions of paying heed to, being alive to, or thinking what one is doing and his closely related appeal to "semi-hypotheticals" or "mongrel categoricals" (on which see Ryle 1949: 118–131 and 136–166).

awareness seems to figure in cases where we act, think, or feel in the light of those facts. Plausibly, one cannot act, think, or feel internal-because p unless one not only knows that p but one is also consciously aware that p . Even more plausibly, there would be something incomplete, or less than full, in exercises of the capacity to act or react for reasons that did not proceed via conscious awareness of those reasons. Ignorance of a reason can take the form not only of not knowing it but also of knowing it but being presently unable to bring what one knows to consciousness. Either of these forms of ignorance is an obstacle to the exercise of one's capacity to operate with that reason. So, there are reasons for Ryle to agree with Cook Wilson that a capacity to apprehend is at least a sub-capacity of the capacity to do, think, or feel for reasons.

Suppose that is right. Does Ryle's discussion provide any reasons for going beyond the more minimal characterisation of knowledge as a capacity that is offered by Cook Wilson and endorsing Ryle's position? The fixed point supplied by Ryle's appeal to *Light* seems to provide the best hope for sponsoring such reasons.¹⁵ The two most obvious paths to explore in trying to discern them are a direct route, via an attempt to derive Ryle's proposal from *Light*, and an indirect route, via an inference to the best explanation of *Light*, which would depend in turn on the derivability of *Light* from Ryle's proposal. I shall conclude by considering these routes in turn.

Beginning with the direct route, what is wanted is a derivation of (6) and (7) from the restatement of *Light* in (5) (where all the conditionals are necessitated and "thereby" is a shorthand for determination by what these capacities most fundamentally are and not mere necessary connection):

- (5) If S acts, thinks, or feels some way internal-because p , then S knows that p .
- (6) If S has the capacity to act, think, or feel some way internal-because p , then S thereby knows that p .
- (7) If S knows that p , then S thereby has the capacity to act, think, or feel some way internal-because p .¹⁶

Although we will consider whether either (6) or (7) can be derived, it is important to notice that (6) is common ground between Ryle and Cook Wilson. It is (7) that divides them.

¹⁵ Longworth ms considers and rejects some other arguments discernible in Ryle 1949.

¹⁶ Even as necessitated and patched with "thereby," the conditionals in (6) and (7) are too weak to capture what the proponent of Ryle's position needs ultimately to defend. One sort of opponent will allow the truth of conditionals but argue that there is an explanatory asymmetry between knowing (or not knowing) that p and having (or not having) the capacity to act, think, or feel internal-because p . They will claim that knowing (or not knowing) that p explains having (or not having) the target capacity. By contrast, they will claim that having (or not having) the target capacity does not explain knowing (or not knowing) that p and, perhaps, that it does not explain manifestations of the capacity. For example, it is plausible that one's ignorance of the fact that p —e.g., one's failure to know that p —can explain one's lacking the capacity to act internal-because p but that one's lacking the capacity to act internal-because p cannot explain one's ignorance. This is related in turn to the role for apprehension in operating with reasons defended earlier in §4. Here, it is plausible that a temporary inability to apprehend that p can explain, but cannot be explained by, a temporary inability to act internal-because p . The issues in this area are related to questions, mentioned in §1, about the extent to which Ryle's proposal presents knowledge as unified as opposed to as a mere congeries of capacities. For discussion focused on Hyman's version of Ryle's proposal, see Williamson 2000: 64, fn.1, 2018, Hyman 2006, 2015, 2018, Setiya 2011, 2013.

A tempting first move would be to try to approach (6) by inserting “can” into (5)¹⁷, but that would deliver only (8) rather than any closer approximation to (6):

(8) If S can act, think, or feel some way because p , then S *can* know that p .

A more measured approach would make use of the suggestion made above, in our discussion of the potential role of apprehension in Ryle’s position, that operating with reasons requires not only knowledge but the exercise of knowledge. That supports deriving (9) as a consequent strengthening of (5):

(9) If S acts, thinks, or feels some way because p , then S *exercises* knowledge that p .

And now we can again attempt to insert “can”, this time delivering (10):

(10) If S can act, think, or feel some way because p , then S can exercise knowledge that p .

This takes us closer to (6), but we still need a means of moving from (10) to (6). The challenge that must be addressed if we are to make that transition is that it is possible that something *can* F while lacking a *capacity* to F . There are at least two ways in which it can be true that something can F while lacking a capacity to F . The first way is for it to have a capacity to G , where G -ing is sufficient for F -ing, but only due to facts extrinsic to the capacity to G . That sort of gap would be bridged if F -ing were shown not to be decomposable into an element that could be the responsibility of a capacity to G plus other elements. It was suggested earlier that this is plausible, both with respect to operating with reasons and with respect to exercising knowledge, and so the first sort of gap may not present a decisive impediment. The second way is for something to have a capacity to acquire a capacity to F . The remaining challenge for the defender of the derivation is to explain how this gap is to be bridged.¹⁸

Fairly obviously, the attempt to derive (7) from (5) runs aground more quickly. Here, what is needed are reasons to think that the necessary condition for operating with reasons that is specified in (5)—namely, knowledge—is the *only* necessary condition. Our Cook-Wilsonian counterproposal rejects the operative form of that claim by viewing possession of separate capacities to act, think, or feel for whatever reasons are available to one as an additional

¹⁷ Applying the normal modal theorem $\Box(A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow \Box(\Diamond A \rightarrow \Diamond B)$.

¹⁸ Williamson 2018 exploits the second sort of gap in one of his putative counterexamples to Hyman’s version of (6). The case he offers is of someone who, he claims, can do things internal-because their eyes are closed even while their eyes are open and so they do not know that their eyes are closed. They can do things internal-because their eyes are closed because they can close their eyes and can know that their eyes are closed when they are. That is, in our terms, they have the capacity to know that their eyes are closed and so the capacity to have the capacity to do things because their eyes are closed. Hyman 2018 suggests that the counterexample fails because being able to act because p is factive in something like the way that acting because p is factive. That response might be challenged. However, a safer rejoinder would be that non-factuality is an artefact of the case. Consider the following case. It is raining but I do not know this. Nonetheless, it might be claimed that I can do things because it is raining, since I can easily glance out of the window and so can easily come to know that it is raining. One way of trying to respond, both to the example and the challenge in the text, would involve the following two steps. First, provide an account of change or alteration on which neither exercising knowledge nor exercising a capacity to operate with reasons involves changing or altering whereas exercising a capacity to acquire a capacity does involve changing. Second, defend the following development of (10): If S can *without changing* act, think, or feel some way because p , then S can *without changing* exercise knowledge that p . See here Aristotle *De Anima* II.5.

necessary condition. The challenge here is to show not only that one who knows also has what it takes to operate with reasons, but also that their having what it takes is explained by their knowing, rather than by separate capacities that one who knows is bound also to possess.

Turning to the indirect route, there are two conditions on successful implementation: a demonstration that (6) and (7) can both figure in explaining (5) together with provision of reasons for thinking that no better explanation is available. Let us assume that (6) and (7) can figure in explaining (5) if (a) (5) can be derived from (6) and (7), together with collateral truths, and (b) both (6) and (7) are essential to that derivation.

To begin, assume the left-hand side of (5), that *S* acts, thinks, or feels some way because *p*. The aim will be to derive its right-hand side from that starting point. Plausibly, *S* acts, thinks, or feels some way because *p* only if *S* has the capacity to do so. Plugging that result into (6) delivers the consequent of (5), that *S* knows that *p*. So, we can derive (5) from (6). The difficulty is that, as was noted above, (6) is neutral between Ryle and Cook Wilson. The locus of their disagreement is (7), which does not figure in this derivation. Since the capacity of (6) to explain (5) does not provide even indirect support to (7), we have not as yet uncovered resources in Ryle that would support his position over Cook Wilson's.

The aim of this preliminary comparative evaluation has not been to establish a victor. Rather, its aim has been to specify more precisely the central disagreement between Cook Wilson and Ryle and to indicate some ways in which that disagreement is not straightforward to settle. Insofar as Cook Wilson and Ryle can agree that one who knows possesses both a capacity to apprehend and a capacity to do, think, or feel in the light of what they know, there is perhaps something a little scholastic about the further question, which, if either, of these capacities deserves to be identified with factual knowledge? However, that putative reservation in fact simply presents a third possible response. I therefore commend the question to you as worthy of further critical attention.

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