

# Ideology and Knowledge-How: A Rylean Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** In work culminating in *Know How* (2009), Jason Stanley argues, against Gilbert Ryle, that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that. In *How Propaganda Works* (2015), Stanley portrays this work as undermining a “flawed ideology” supporting elitist valuations of intellectual work and workers. However, the link between Stanley’s two philosophical projects is weak. Ryle’s distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that lacks the political consequences foreseen by Stanley. Versions of “intellectualism” have as much potential to align with hierarchical political systems as do versions of “anti-intellectualism.” Consequently, the debate about knowledge-how and knowledge-that comes apart from Stanley’s more recent concerns about flawed ideologies.

**Keywords:** ideology, knowledge-how, knowledge-that, intellectualism, Jason Stanley, Gilbert Ryle.

**RESUMEN:** En un trabajo que encuentra su culminación en *Know How* (2009), Jason Stanley argumenta, en contra de Gilbert Ryle, que el saber-cómo es una especie del saber-qué. En *How Propaganda Works* (2015), Stanley presenta su trabajo como debilitador de una “falsa ideología” que respalda valoraciones elitistas del trabajo intelectual y los trabajadores intelectuales. Sin embargo, la conexión entre los dos proyectos filosóficos de Stanley es débil. La distinción de Ryle entre saber-cómo y saber-qué no tiene las consecuencias políticas previstas por Stanley. Algunas versiones del “intelectualismo” tienen el mismo potencial para alinearse con sistemas políticos jerárquico que algunas versiones del “anti-intelectualismo”. En consecuencia, el debate en torno a las nociones de saber-cómo y saber-qué no tiene incidencia sobre la preocupación más reciente de Stanley acerca de las ideologías falsas.

**Palabras clave:** ideología, saber-cómo, saber-qué, intelectualismo, Jason Stanley, Gilbert Ryle.

## I. Introduction

In Chapter Six of *How Propaganda Works*, “The Ideology of Elites,” Jason Stanley provides a case study of a “flawed ideology,” which functions to explain and justify an unjust social distribution of goods, and prevents both the privileged elites who benefit from this distri-

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bution, and those oppressed by it, from coming to knowledge of the injustice of the structures of their society. This ideology combines a belief in the meritocratic nature of the distribution of wealth with a belief in a natural distinction between two classes of humans: those suited to intellectual work, and those suited to mere manual labor. In the Preface, Stanley connects his earlier work on practical knowledge with his critique of this ideology: “The second project that has occupied me over the last fifteen years, including in my book *Know How*, published in 2011, has been a thoroughgoing repudiation of the scientific and philosophical basis of this ideology.” (Stanley 2015, xix) In that project, Stanley had argued against the distinction, drawn by Gilbert Ryle in the middle of the twentieth century, between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, and defended a “reasonable intellectualism,” according to which knowledge-how is a *species* of knowledge-that. The link that Stanley sees between this earlier project and his critique of the ideology of elites is revealed in *How Propaganda Works* when he moves smoothly from discussing a distinction between “theoretical activity” and “manual labor,” to one between “theoretical reflection” and “practical skill.” (Stanley 2015, 271, 278)

This essay concerns the supposed link Stanley wishes to make between his two philosophical projects. I will argue that Stanley has failed to connect them as tightly as he imagines. A consideration of Ryle’s views on knowledge shows that Ryle’s version of the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that has none of the political consequences foreseen by Stanley. Moreover, Ryle’s writings provide materials to argue that versions of “intellectualism” have as much potential to align with hierarchical political systems as do versions of the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge. Consequently, the issue of the relationship between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is strictly orthogonal to Stanley’s more recent concerns about flawed ideologies. None of this undercuts Stanley’s insightful analysis of the complex relationship between demagoguery and flawed ideology, or indeed his critique of the ideology that is his main target in “The Ideology of Elites.” It does, however, raise challenging questions about the source of his conviction that the latter project depends on his earlier defense of intellectualism.

## II. *Background: Ryle’s distinction and Stanley’s intellectualism*

I begin with a brief summary of Ryle’s and Stanley’s respective accounts of the relation of knowledge-how and knowledge-that. Ryle contended that “knowledge-how cannot be defined in terms of knowledge-that.” (Ryle 1971c, 215) He approached this conclusion through a critical discussion of the “intellectualist legend,” that “... practical activities merit their titles ‘intelligent,’ ‘clever,’ and the rest only because they are accompanied by ... internal acts of considering propositions...” (Ryle 1971c, 212, 215) He assimilated knowing-how to intelligent action, and concluded that knowledge-how cannot be explained in terms of explicit guidance by propositional knowledge. According to Ryle, the intellectualist incorrectly assumes “that the primary exercise of minds consists in finding the answers to questions and that their other occupations are merely applications of considered truths or even regrettable distractions from their consideration.” (Ryle 1949, 26)

Stanley, in contrast, argues for an intellectualist view of knowledge-how as “simply a species of knowledge-that.” (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 411) Like Ryle’s intellectualist, he links knowledge-how with knowledge of the answers to questions: “...when you

learned how to swim ... you learned ... the proposition that answers a question – the question ‘How could you swim?’ Knowing how to do something therefore amounts to knowing the answer to a question.” (Stanley 2011b, vi) On his view, for *S* to know *how* to *V* is for *S* to know *that W* is a way in which *S herself* could *V*, for some way *W* with which *S* is acquainted. (Stanley 2011b, 122) Stanley defends this account with arguments stemming from the linguistic theory of embedded questions, and develops his theory to encompass a wide variety of related phenomena, such as the learning of complex skills.

Ryle, however, constructed regress arguments against his intellectualist opponent, along the following lines: since the application of propositional knowledge can be carried out intelligently or stupidly, if intellectualism is true, “no intelligent act, practical or theoretical, could ever begin.” (Ryle 1971c, 213) But, Stanley replies, such arguments only undermine “unreasonable intellectualists,” who hold that “intelligent action requires a prior act of self-avowing the propositional knowledge that guides one’s actions.” (Stanley 2011b, 14) His own “reasonable intellectualism” denies this assumption: “someone can act on their propositional knowledge without a prior act of contemplating a proposition.” (Stanley 2011b, 15) Even if we accept Stanley’s counter to the regress argument, Ryle has other arguments, such as the fact that knowledge-how, unlike knowledge-that, comes in degrees, and can be acquired gradually. (Ryle 1949, 59) Stanley again replies that his theory can account for such apparent “non-parallelisms” between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. (Stanley 2011b, 32ff) It would take us too far afield to evaluate this debate; I will only mention here that Ellen Fridland has generated some serious difficulties for Stanley’s intellectualism, related to Rylean concerns about the “gradability” of knowledge-how.

### *III. Stanley’s political critique of the practical/theoretical distinction*

Stanley and Williamson claim that Ryle’s distinction “impoverishes our understanding of human action, by obscuring the way in which it is informed by intelligence.” (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 444) For Stanley, this is not a merely theoretical point. It has deep and important political consequences: the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge promotes an undemocratic and hierarchical view of human nature. Stanley presents this argument in a 2012 *New York Times* op-ed piece, “The Practical and the Theoretical,” and builds on it in *How Propaganda Works*. In the *Times* piece, he states that “Our society is divided into castes based upon a supposed division between theoretical knowledge and practical skill. The college professor holds forth on television, as the plumber fumes about detached ivory tower intellectuals.” He links the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge to the idea that “exercises of theoretical knowledge involve active reflection, engagement with the propositions or rules of the theory in question that guides the subsequent exercise of the knowledge,” while “practical knowledge is exercised automatically and without reflection.” This supports an anti-democratic hierarchy in which knowledge workers are thought to be superior to those whose work involves only “knowledge” so-called. Fortunately, however, his own philosophical work frees us from this danger: “once one bears down on the supposed distinction between practical knowledge and knowledge of truths, it breaks down. The plumber’s or electrician’s activities are a manifestation of the same kind of intelligence as the scientist’s or historian’s latest articles — knowledge of truths.” Stanley concludes: “The distinction between the practical and the theoretical

is used to warehouse society into groups. It alienates and divides. It is fortunate that it is nothing more than a fiction.” (Stanley 2012)

In the final chapter of *How Propaganda Works*, Stanley elaborates this moral and political critique of the practical/theoretical distinction. He summarizes his argument in the Introduction (Stanley 2015, xviii-xix):

...the desire to relegate one group of society to the task of manual labor is a powerful feature of human social psychology. The justification for such a division of labor is typically based on differential attributions of the human capacity for theoretical reflection. Some groups, it is said, are best equipped for practical tasks and others for theoretical tasks, a view that has traditionally been at the basis of the justification of slavery. But almost every society, whether or not it has a practice of slavery, endorses some version of it.

Stanley leads from this summary directly to the claim quoted above, that his earlier work on knowledge-how undermines the scientific and philosophical basis of this ideology.

Stanley does not mention Ryle by name in either the *Times* op-ed or in *How Propaganda Works*. But he does argue that his previous work on knowledge-how can help to liberate us from a hierarchical division of society into castes by showing the distinction between practical knowledge and knowledge of truths to be an illusion, and that his intellectualism undermines the philosophical basis of the ideology that justifies slavery. I will argue, however, that Ryle’s non-intellectualist distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that does not support such an ideology and does not entail alienation, division, and the warehousing of society into groups. Hence, Stanley’s intellectualism cannot be the *required* cure of the social ills and flawed ideologies diagnosed in *How Propaganda Works*. The question of the relation of knowledge-how and knowledge-that is strictly orthogonal to the issues Stanley addresses in his attack on propaganda and flawed ideologies.

#### IV. Ryle on knowledge

I begin by outlining Ryle’s positive view of the relationship between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.<sup>2</sup> The crucial point is due to David Wiggins: for Ryle, knowledge-how is not a species of knowledge-that – but neither are things the other way around. As Wiggins points out, “To say that knowing how to  $V$  and knowing that  $p$  represent or manifest different determinable powers of mind and the second cannot subsume the first is not to say that these powers can be activated separately or to deny that they have manifold relations of interdependence.” Wiggins adds that “Ryle is in a position not merely to allow but also to assert that, in their full distinctness, knowing how to and knowing that need one another,” so that there is a “constant back-and-forth between knowledge that rests on the practical and knowledge which rests on the propositional.” (Wiggins 2009, 264-5) Wiggins illustrates this “back and forth” with several examples. But the form of interdependence they exhibit is, for Ryle, part of the very structure of knowledge, both propositional and practical.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a dogmatic summary. In “A Capacity to Get Things Right” I develop my interpretation in detail, providing more textual evidence than is possible here.

In a slogan: for Ryle, the relation of knowledge-how to knowledge-that is not that of species to genus; it is more like that of two species to a common genus.<sup>3</sup> The core concept of knowledge is that of a *capacity to get things right*. This is specified into the concepts of knowledge-how and knowledge-that:

- “What is involved in our descriptions of people as knowing how to make and appreciate jokes, to talk grammatically, to play chess, to fish, or to argue? ...A person’s performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right.” (Ryle 1949, 29)
- “‘Know’ is a capacity verb, and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off, or get things right. ‘Believe’, on the other hand, is a tendency verb and one which does not connote that anything is brought off or got right.” (Ryle 1949, 133-4)

Ryle does not think, however, that propositional knowledge amounts to the capacity to “get right” the answer to a question.<sup>4</sup> Rather, just as the *tendency* that is propositional belief is exhibited in multifarious behavior and feeling, so is the *capacity* that is propositional knowledge (Ryle 1949, 134-5):

Certainly to believe that the ice is dangerously thin is to be unhesitant in telling oneself and others that it is thin, in acquiescing in other people’s assertions to that effect, in objecting to statements to the contrary, in drawing consequences from the original proposition, and so forth. But it is also to be prone to skate warily, to shudder, to dwell in imagination on possible disasters and to warn other skaters. It is a propensity not only to make certain theoretical moves but also to make certain executive and imaginative moves, as well as to have certain feelings. ...

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 these ways too. But to say that he keeps to the edge, because he knows that the ice is thin, is to employ quite a different sense of ‘because’, or to give quite a different sort of ‘explanation’, from that conveyed by saying that he keeps to the edge because he believes that the ice is thin.

Following John Hyman, I interpret this pregnant passage as saying that one who *knows* that the ice is thin has the capacity to take the *fact* that the ice is thin to be a *reason* for action – and so to “get things right” in her action by being guided by the way the world is. (Hyman 1999, 442, 446; Hyman 2015, 171)

For Ryle, then, both knowledge-how and knowledge-that are *capacities*. But as Wiggins pointed out, these two capacities are *interdependent*. Ryle argues that knowledge-that depends on various forms of observational and intellectual knowledge-how: “to know a truth, I must have discovered or established it. But discovering and establishing are intelligent operations.” He concludes that “mathematics, philosophy, tactics, scientific method,

<sup>3</sup> This formulation will do for our purposes; I develop a more careful interpretation in “A Capacity to Get Things Right.” I argue there that for Ryle, “know” is a *polysemous* term, and “knows how” and “knows that” are analogically related, like the different senses of “exists” in which tables and numbers can be said to exist.

<sup>4</sup> (Hartland-Swann 1956) interprets Ryle as committed to such a view.

and literary style are not bodies of information but branches of know how” and that even “a scientist ... is primarily a knower-how and only secondarily a knower-that.” (Ryle 1971c, 224) Knowledge-how also depends on knowledge-that, since to “apply criteria in performing critically” one must be aware of what one is doing, how well one is succeeding, what is going on in one’s environment, and so on. Ryle puts this point by saying that in acquiring a skill one becomes one’s own coach and referee. He uses this idea to explain how we can “expect a person who applies his mind to anything to be able to tell, without research, what he has been engaged in or occupied with” – that is, to have knowledge of what they have been doing without engaging in study of it.<sup>5</sup> (Ryle 1949, 147-8)

This sketch of Ryle’s conception of knowledge already suggests that Stanley’s concerns about the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge do not carry over to Ryle’s distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. *Both* Stanley’s college professor *and* Stanley’s plumber are, for Ryle, as much knowers-how as knowers-that. *Ryle’s* distinction does not divide them. To further support this conclusion, though, we must consider how Stanley develops his argument in *How Propaganda Works*.

#### V. Deeper into Stanley’s political critique

In Stanley’s outline of his argument in *How Propaganda Works*, he links the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge with a distinction between (merely) manual labor and intellectual labor. The thought that “some groups ... are best equipped for practical tasks and others for theoretical tasks” is said to justify “the desire to relegate one group of society to the task of manual labor.” (Stanley 2015, xviii-xix) By rejecting the practical/theoretical distinction, he aims to undercut the “flawed ideology” that grounds the manual labor/intellectual labor distinction. Following Gramsci he claims that “the distinction ... between practical skill and intellectual reflection cannot be drawn. There are no laborers, no wage earners, no people whose activity is *solely* a matter of physical strength.” (Stanley 2015, 272)

Stanley fleshes out his argument with a historical analysis showing how this flawed ideology undergirded the development of an educational system based on a strict division of intellectual education and vocational training in early twentieth century America. This system in turn reinforced and perpetuated class distinctions favoring elites over the lower classes.<sup>6</sup> But Stanley prefaces this analysis with a discussion of Ancient Greek debates over slavery (Stanley 2015, 270-1):

<sup>5</sup> Ryle’s discussions of teaching, training, coaching, and the development of skill, are informed by his experiences not only as a philosophy professor, but also as an undergraduate rower (captain of the Queens College team in his last year), and later, as a rowing coach. J. D. Mabbott reports that Ryle “gave up many afternoons to coaching” and recalls “listening with fascination to him instructing a St. John’s Eight, with a flow of metaphors ranging from reproachful elephants and camels to commendatory swallows.” (Mabbott 1993, 224)

<sup>6</sup> Ryle’s attitude towards such a system can perhaps be inferred from his close connection to his older sister, Effie Ryle, a Quaker who worked with the Adult School Movement in Great Britain. Effie authored a number of texts for teaching working class adults such subjects as Latin and the Bible, and worked as a teacher of working men and women. (Martin 1924, 200, 244, 247, 364). In the latter part

...Aristotle argues that the *master* and the *slave* engage in two quite distinct kinds of activities. ... the slave is naturally born to know how to perform servile activities. In contrast, those in the household who are “above toil” have others attend to their household while they “occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics.” ... The Ancient Greeks recognized that practical skill revealed intelligence. But ... they did have a category for a kind of labor that was not intelligent in nature. Let us call this *manual labor* or *menial labor*. Aristotle thus provides a natural basis for a division of society into groups, one of which will serve as the source of the leaders, and one of which is thought of specifically as the source of manual labor. The characteristic defense of class distinctions is an ideologically flawed belief in a distinction between theory and practice, or between *mere practical skill* and the exercise of theoretical knowledge. The ideology of class elitism rests upon a belief, already clearly articulated in Plato and Aristotle, that at least one group in society is not capable of theoretical activity, but only of manual labor.

Although Stanley writes that Aristotle’s slave is “born to *know how* to perform servile activities,” he sees this Aristotelian/Rylean “know how” as not truly *knowledge*, since it is not a form of knowledge-that.<sup>7</sup> He concludes that to distinguish theoretical and practical knowledge is to equate the servile activities of the slave with “manual labor” that is “not intelligent in nature.” The Rylean distinction between two *forms* of knowledge, two ways in which intelligence can be manifested, becomes a distinction between *mere* practical skill and the exercise of (theoretical, that is real) *intelligence* and *knowledge*. But Ryle’s view on the interdependence of the two forms of knowledge breaks the link between the practical/theoretical distinction, and a problematic distinction between knowledge-less manual labor and knowledge-laden intellectual work. Yet it is this link that allows Stanley to see his intellectualist position as crucial to dismantling the flawed ideology supporting slavery and other forms of elitism.

Ryle’s discussion of “The Primacy of the Intellect,” in chapter IX of *The Concept of Mind*, might be seen as evidence that Ryle does accept the problematic form of the practical/theoretical distinction, however. There, Ryle seeks to avoid the apparent consequence of his view that “since planning and theoretical operations can themselves be characterized as purposive, skillful, careful, ambitious, voluntary and the rest, I regard these operations merely as special occupations on all fours with such occupations as tying knots, following tunes, or playing hide-and-seek.” Fending off this “democratisation of the offices of the old elite,” which “will have seemed ... shocking,” (Ryle 1949, 280) he claims that “intellectual work has a cultural primacy, since it is the work of those who have received and can give a higher education,” adding that “barbarians and infants do not do intellectual work, since, if they did, we should describe them instead as at least part-civilised and near to school age.”

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of her life, Effie lived with Ryle’s mother, his twin sister Mary, and Mary’s adopted daughter Janet, in a house in Bucklebury, Berkshire, in which Ryle also lived when not at Oxford. (Author’s interview with Janet (Ryle) Beckley, November 4, 2015.) It is not unlikely that Ryle discussed pedagogy with his elder sister. Putting together Ryle’s work coaching Oxford undergraduates in rowing (see note 5) with his sister’s work teaching working class men and women the classics that formed the backbone of a British public school education, we get a very different conception of schooling than one depending on a strict separation of vocational training and intellectual education.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Stanley in “Knowing (how)”: “According to the Rylean, knowing-how is a relation that holds between a person and an action-type. It is distinct from *knowing*, which is a relation that holds between a person and a proposition.” (Stanley 2011a, 226)

(Ryle 1949, 314) The prejudices on display here are not surprising in an academic whose career was devoted to the promotion and growth of the discipline of philosophy. But they are neither intrinsic to, nor supported by, Ryle's distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. Intellectual work is as much a form of knowledge-how as skilled physical labor, for Ryle; his bias in favor of intellectual work does not reflect an over-valuation of knowledge-that as opposed to knowledge-how, but an over-valuation of certain forms of knowledge-how, exhibited in following and delivering lectures, being amused at witticisms, constructing Greek sentences, and calculating probabilities, to cite examples from *The Concept of Mind*. (Ryle 1949, 314-317)

Therefore, Ryle's distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that does not support a caste system in which the college professor and the plumber are separated by the former's possession of elite intellectual knowledge-that and the latter's possession of mere physical knowledge-how. The college professor, as teacher, as scientist, and as theoretician, is as much a knower-how as the plumber. The plumber may have as much knowledge-that as the college professor. Furthermore, the college professor's knowledge (both knowledge-how and knowledge-that) need not be more reflective than that of the plumber, nor need the plumber's knowledge be more "automatic" than that of the professor. Both the professor's and the plumber's knowledge-how essentially involves "performing critically ... in order to get things right." Ryle's *point* is to enable us to recognize knowledge-how as much as knowledge-that *as knowledge*, a manifestation of our intelligence and rationality, without having to be the "step-child" of intellection, ratiocination, and knowledge-that.

This goal is an essential part of his larger project in *The Concept of Mind*. Ryle's attack on the "intellectualist legend" constitutes the first salvo of his critique of "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine," that "every human being has both a body and a mind," so that "a person ... lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind." (Ryle 1949, 11) Ryle's overarching claim is that this "dogma" is "entirely false ... one big mistake ... a philosopher's myth." (Ryle 1949, 26) But this dogma is in a relation of mutual support with the "intellectualist legend." People are "drawn to believe ... that the intelligent execution of an operation must embody two processes, one of doing and another of theorising" because, "wedded to the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine," they conclude that "muscular doing cannot itself be a mental operation." In consequence, they think that for an action "to earn the title 'skilful', 'cunning', or 'humorous', it must ... get it by transfer from another counterpart act occurring not 'in the machine' but 'in the ghost'; for 'skilful', 'cunning' and 'humorous' are certainly mental predicates." (Ryle 1949, 32) Ryle aims to show, in contrast, how "muscular doing" *can* "be a mental operation"; how, in the ballerina's dance or the plumber's pipe repair, a person's mindedness, intelligence, rationality, and knowledgeableness is directly present and at work – not "manifested," but simply *there*. For a human being as a rational animal, there can be no distinction for Ryle, such as Stanley condemns, between "*mere* practical skill and the exercise of theoretical knowledge" – the word "*mere*" suggesting that practical skill does not *really* exhibit intelligence, rationality, or knowledge. The distinction between knowledge-less manual labor and knowledge-laden intellectual work, to which Stanley equates the practical/theoretical distinction, is directly opposed to the spirit of Ryle's distinction between knowing how and knowing that. Seen in this light, Ryle's project, as opposed to his prejudices, is in essence profoundly democratic and egalitarian. In fact, Ryle's thought subsequent to the publica-



tion of *The Concept of Mind* moved away from elitism towards democratization, following the logic of his own position.

#### VI. Political dangers of (hyper-) intellectualism?<sup>8</sup>

In a posthumously published essay, simply titled “Reason,” Ryle developed an argument that at least some forms of *intellectualism* are liable to dangerous social and political consequences of the sort Stanley sought to avoid. The paper replays Ryle’s critique of intellectualism, with the concepts of rationality and ratiocination (mentioned briefly in Ryle 1971c, 219) playing the parts of intelligence and intellection. Ryle begins by asking how we can say “that one person is more reasonable or sensible than another, even though it is the second person who has the superior powers of reasoning.” Along the way to explaining this, he makes “what looks like a detour.” (Ryle 1993, 67) It is this detour on which we will focus.

Ryle’s detour concerns “a prejudice or family of prejudices which vitiate people’s judgments” concerning the relation between *reasonableness* and *reasoning*. (Ryle 1993, 67) Ryle wants to trace the source of a “muddle” (Ryle 1993, 69), namely the idea that “the mind or soul of a man consists of three departments of which the management-department is that which does all the thinking, knowing, inferring and so on.” This department, called “Reason” is “given the task of supervising the other departments,” and “so we call people reasonable if *either* they are good at theory, i.e. are logical, *or* they behave in a self-controlled way.” However, this raises the problem of forging a link between “being good at theory” and “being good at self-control.” (Ryle 1993, 68)

Ryle provides a bit of potted history to explain how this muddle arises. He tells us that “the Greeks were the effective inventors of ... Theory. They found out how to theorise...”<sup>9</sup> They then asked “what is the salient difference between Greeks and barbarians?” and “what is the salient difference between men and animals?” They answered both questions by appeal to “Theory”: human beings can theorize while animals cannot, and Greeks can theorize “in an organised way” while barbarians cannot. They inferred that “Animals are irrational, barbarians are sub-rational,” and concluded that “to say that men are rational meant ... that men could perform ... a particular sort of task, namely the regulated production of assemblages of propositions, the construction and marshalling of propositions.” This was “the one thing which made Greeks superior to barbarians, and men to animals...” (Ryle 1993, 68)

Ryle has sketched here the core of Aristotle’s justification of natural slavery in the *Politics*, albeit without mentioning Aristotle by name. Since barbarians lack an effective rational faculty, as shown by their lack of theoretical activity, they also lack the self-control

<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term “hyper-intellectualism” from John Protevi. (Protevi 2015, 8)

<sup>9</sup> Ryle exhibits his own prejudices here, as well as in his 1962 paper “A Rational Animal,” where he writes “Human rationality has here separate and, if you like, genuinely academic objectives and chores of its own, objectives and chores in which the Greeks could with justice say that barbarians, being totally unschooled, could not participate.” (Ryle 1971b, 436) I am not summarizing his telling of the history in order to endorse it; nor do I wish to argue that Ryle was immune to flawed ideological belief. My concern is with the philosophical consequences of his position. (See footnotes 13 and 15 for further discussion of Rylean prejudices and stereotypes.)

needed for a flourishing and virtuous human life, and will benefit from being enslaved to masters in possession of full rationality – the part of us which defines us as human and differentiates us from the other animals. In *How Propaganda Works*, Stanley claimed that this Aristotelian argument rests on the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical skill. But Ryle traces the justification of slavery back to the (hyper-)intellectualist assumption that to be reasonable is to be guided by reasoning.

Ryle argues that the resulting conception of the role of reason in human life is confused by constructing a “fictitious story.” His parable concerns an isolated civilization in which there is an obsession with Contract Bridge: the culture, education, and economy revolve around the game. In two sentences, Ryle makes the link to Aristotle explicit: “They collect slaves in raids but don’t teach them the cards. Their philosophers... define man as a Bridge-playing animal; and a barbarian as a person who hardly plays cards at all.” (Ryle 1993, 69)

Ryle elaborates this fiction in various highly amusing ways, before coming to the obvious response that Bridge can’t be set up as the one defining human feature even though animals don’t play Bridge and people do. Bridge involves the use of intellectual capacities which are “exercised not only in other games but in other things that are not games,” so playing Bridge is “only one facet of the real differentia between men and animals.” (Ryle 1993, 69) Ryle’s reply involves a version of the dependence of knowledge-that on knowledge-how discussed above (Ryle 1993, 69-70):

What you say about the activity of Bridge-playing, I am saying about the activity of organising propositions into theories. ... Yes, man is a ratiocinating animal, but he is a lot more besides – and indeed the fact that he can construct and appreciate valid arguments is itself only a special exercise of something which he can and does exercise in lots of other ways as well.

Ryle immediately turns, however, to “make concessions,” admitting that “theorising is one of the ways in which Man differs from animals – but not just in the way in which Bridge is one card game.” Ryle argues that practical competence is incompatible with complete inability to theorize about one’s competence: “any lesson<sup>10</sup> learned in the sphere of competence is a potential lesson learned in thinking. Learning how to tie knots is a lesson also in talking about knots – or a stage in that lesson.” (Ryle 1993, 71) This might seem to be another facet of the dependence of knowing-how on knowing-that outlined above. But what is involved here is not really a dependence of knowing-how on *particular* knowing-that; it is rather a dependence of *any* knowing-how on at least a modicum of the specific *theoretical knowing-how* required to theorize about one’s competences.

While all of this is interesting and worthy of further thought, our focus is on Ryle’s critique of “prejudices that vitiate people’s judgments.” A comparison of “Reason” with the “The Primacy of the Intellect” section in *The Concept of Mind* suggests that Ryle was in part criticizing his own prejudices in the later essay.<sup>11</sup> While he says in “Reason” that “a

<sup>10</sup> Following the transcription in the *Linacre Journal*, 76, rather than *Aspects of Mind*, which has “lessons.”

<sup>11</sup> Ryle may have been influenced by his experience after the Second World War of teaching students from former colonies in Africa, and Asia. Ryle was the thesis supervisor of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, who praises him along with Strawson and Hampshire as “wonderful teachers” (Wiredu 2003, 330); the Indian philosopher S. S. Barlingay writes of the support he received from

person who could not theorise at all could not act sensibly” (Ryle 1993, 70), this is quite different from his earlier over-valuation of intellectual work. In both places, Ryle is trying to understand the special role of the capacity for theorizing in human rational life. In *The Concept of Mind*, this takes the form of an explanation of “the sense in which intellectual operations are higher than, and do ‘govern’, the exercises of other mental capacities.” Capacities that are the result of “higher education” and provide “some degree of intellectual accomplishment” are highlighted as the mark of civilization. Ryle uses examples like being amused at a witticism by Voltaire, knowing the rules of Greek and Latin grammar, and identifying a magnetite. (Ryle 1949, 314-7) In “Reason,” Ryle shows that “theorising is one of the ways in which man differs from animals – but not just in the way in which Bridge is one card game” using such examples as being able to think and talk about: managing one’s affairs, playing chess, sizing up one’s acquaintances, judging distances, and tying knots. There is a palpable sense of descent from the ivory tower in moving from the earlier to the later text.

Ryle’s argument in “Reason” makes clear that a version of *intellectualism* might fill a need to mark a distinction between slave-owners (Greeks) and slaves (barbarians), so as to justify the institution of slavery. I conclude with a historical case study, showing how at least one intellectualist, contemporary with Ryle, developed an account of human nature and the place of theoretical thinking in human intelligence that supported a racist and hierarchical ideology.

In his *Manual of Psychology*,<sup>12</sup> G. F. Stout, editor of *Mind* and teacher of both Russell and Moore, distinguished “animal intelligence” from “human intelligence” in terms reminiscent of Ryle’s “intellectualist legend” (Stout 1901, 276):

The vast interval which separates human achievements, so far as they depend on human intelligence, from animal achievements, so far as they depend on animal intelligence, is connected with the distinction between perceptual and ideational process. Animal activities are either purely perceptual, or, in so far as they involve ideas, these ideas only serve to prompt and guide an action in its actual execution. On the other hand, man constructs “in his head,” by means of trains of ideas, schemes of action before he begins to carry them out. He is thus capable of overcoming difficulties in advance. He can cross a bridge before he comes to it.

Stout credits some intelligence to animals, who do not engage in prior mental planning. But, he claims, such thinking is required for the higher form of truly *human* intelligence. Arguably, this view is in the target range of Ryle’s attack on intellectualism, and would fall into the category of Stanley’s “unreasonable intellectualism.”

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Ryle who was “willing to take me under his wing,” “was very good in personal discussion,” and secured him an introduction to L.E.J. Brouwer (Barlingay 1994, 19-21); and the Chinese philosopher Chen Lee Sun credits Ryle with providing a “refuge” from an unnamed college don who had taken a disliking to her, and with being “the only heavyweight intellectual who had seriously tutored me in my life.” (Sun 2011, liv-lv).

<sup>12</sup> The books Ryle donated to Linacre College library included a copy of the second edition, from which I quote. Ryle’s annotations reveal Stout’s influence on his thought, especially concerning the idea of “automatisms” produced by “habit,” and “feeling-tone” of sensation. See “Ryle’s ‘Intellectualist Legend’ in Historical Context” for further discussion.

In his Preface, Stout sets up a program, justified on Darwinian grounds, but mirroring the story Ryle told about Greeks seeking to differentiate themselves from barbarians along the same scale on which they differentiated humans from animals (Stout 1901, vi):

The present work contains an exposition of Psychology from a genetic point of view. A glance at the table of contents will show that the order followed is that of the successive stages of mental development. The earlier stages have been copiously illustrated by reference to the mental life of animals. The phases through which the ideal construction of Self and the world has passed are illustrated by reference to the mental condition of the lower races of mankind.

Such was the plan for a highly influential textbook of psychology that went through five editions between 1899 and 1938. Let us see how this plan was carried out in several interesting cases.<sup>13</sup>

According to Stout, the “perceptual process” characteristic of “animal intelligence” has an “impulsive character” and lacks the unity “implied in the concept of a person.” Consequently, “we must deny personality to animals,” since they are “in the main creatures of impulse.” (Stout 1901, 276) He argues that “self as a whole uniting present, past and future phases, and the world as a single coherent system of things and processes, are ideal constructions, built up gradually in the course of human development.” He extends this to the claim that “the ideal construction of Self and of the world,” while absent in animals, “is comparatively rudimentary in the lower races of mankind...” (Stout 1901, 277) Here, Stout sets up a threefold hierarchy of development: civilized men, savages, animals. He repeatedly appeals to this hierarchy, and its organizing principle is always the same: a supposed difference in intellectual development.

In one passage, Stout takes up the problem Ryle attributed to the ancient Greeks, of connecting “being good at theory” and “being good at self-control” (Stout 1901, 628):

Self-control is greatest in the man whose life is dominated by ideals and general principles of conduct; but this involves a development of conceptual consciousness which is absent in children and savages. We accordingly find that children and savages are to a great extent creatures of impulse; they have comparatively little power of deliberation...<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Stout was hardly alone in the kinds of views I sketch here. Ryle himself was not wholly innocent of the racist stereotypes of his day. He repeats several times the example of “the sharper-eyed Red Indian” (also “lynx-eyed”) who is unable to observe a football goal or a checkmate, for want of the proper training. (Ryle 1971a, 154; Ryle 1971b, 83, 88; in Ryle 1970b, 44, it is the “unschooled Red Indian” who “can neither solve nor mis-solve problems in multiplication and spelling.”) In the section on “The Primacy of the Intellect” in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle equates “savages,” with infants: “every advanced craft, game, project, amusement, organisation or industry is necessarily above the heads of untutored savages or infants, or else we would not call them advanced.” (Ryle 1949, 317) Yet Ryle’s point in such cases always concerns the way in which someone’s “wits” have been trained or tutored. He never asserts an intrinsic difference in the innate quality of those “wits,” as is suggested in Stout’s talk of “lower races.”

<sup>14</sup> The passage continues in a veritable deluge of racist stereotypes, occupying almost a full page of the *Manual*, in which Stout emphasizes the similarity of “savages” to “young children” in their supposed impulsiveness, indulgence, wastefulness, lack of concern for the future, inability to pursue remote ends, lack of industry, and failure to understand the value of time – all of which “often sorely tries the patience of the civilised European.” Lacking the ability for advanced planning characteristic of “human

In a subsequent discussion of “True Freedom,” we find that “savages” barely have personality or character (Stout 1901, 633):

Character exists only in so far as unity and continuity of conscious life exists and manifests itself in systematic consistency of conduct. Animals can scarcely be said to have a character, because their actions flow from disconnected impulse. ... Character is little developed in savages as compared with civilised men; for they have relatively little power of considering particular actions in relation to an organised system of conduct.

The principle that “we have in savage races examples of stages of mental development incomparably more rudimentary than our own,” so that “by noting the points in which they differ from us we may obtain a clue to the nature of the differences between ourselves and primitive man” (Stout 1901, 482) shapes many of Stout’s discussions, especially in his chapter on “Belief and Imagination” which is full of examples of the superstitious beliefs of savages.

A particularly striking example occurs in his account of the “unity of consciousness.” Stout distinguishes the “mental life of the animal ... composed of a series of detached and independent impulses” from the “interweaving of interests in a system” that “constitutes the unity of personal life,” which itself “may exist in very varying degrees.” He runs down a hierarchical ordering: “the mental life of such men as Hegel, or Comte, or Bismarck, or Newton, forms a far more systematic unity than that of the man in the street”; “the mental life of the civilised man is, in general, far more completely unified than that of the savage”; and finally “the mental life of man has a unity which is not found in the animal.” (Stout 1901, 85)

We are already primed to expect the ordering of “savages” as somewhere between animals and the fully human “civilised man.” But Stout’s comparison of “unity of personal life” of Hegel, Comte, Bismarck and Newton with that of the “man in the street,” mirrors Stanley’s example of the college professor and the plumber.<sup>15</sup> Stout gives no reason other

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intelligence,” savages, like young children, value trivial present affairs over “the great business of life.” Stout concludes: “The bird in the hand is to them worth a thousand in the bush.” (Stout 1901, 628-9)

<sup>15</sup> Something like this progression can be found in the concluding paragraph of Ryle’s 1962 paper “A Rational Animal” (Ryle 1971d, 433-4):

If we enjoy the egotistical pastime of giving to mankind testimonials which we withhold from other creatures; or if, more sensibly but still platitudinously, we like to give to civilized man testimonials which we withhold from uncivilized man, and to civilized man at his highest, which we half-withhold from civilized man at his decent but unglorious mean, we shall certainly lay great, though not exclusive, emphasis on his past performances and his future promises as a theorist, that is, as an advancer of knowledge, no matter whether this be knowledge of nature, mathematical knowledge or knowledge of human ways and human callings.

However, Ryle distances himself from the “egotistical” and “platitudinous” pastimes of giving testimonials to the accomplishments of those who have been able to achieve much thanks to educational advantages. Furthermore, he immediately adds a warning: “What we must not do is to confuse testimonials with explanations. Yet this is just what we do when we treat special and specially inculcated proficiencies as elemental agencies or forces...” (Ryle 1971d, 433) This, however, is exactly what Stout, with his talk of higher and lower *races*, is guilty of.

than intellectualist prejudice to suppose that the mental life of, for example, Newton, is more unified than that of a plumber. Newton was a great physicist and mathematician. He was also a reclusive, sometimes delusional dabbler in alchemy. His obsessive secretiveness caused one of the great controversies of modern science through his failure to publish his discovery of the infinitesimal calculus, followed by his claims of priority (many of them carried out anonymously) when Leibniz published his own version.<sup>16</sup> None of this matters to Stout, who judges Newton's unity of consciousness directly from his intellectual output. We see here how Stout's supposedly scientific claims about the mental state of "savage races" are really just reflections of his own prejudice in favor of, to use Ryle's metaphor, "Contract Bridge" over other card games.

It would be a fallacy to conclude that *Stanley's* form of intellectualism is liable to the same misuses as Stout's. Stanley would rightly be horrified by any suggestion that his philosophy might keep such company, and would view Stout's position, with its focus on conscious planning, as an unjustified hyper-intellectualism, to be contrasted with his own *reasonable* intellectualism. Moreover, early 20<sup>th</sup> century "anti-intellectualists," as they were widely called, can easily compete with intellectualists like Stout for a place in the appropriate circle of hell. The prominent psychologist William McDougall, who popularized the phrase "the intellectualist fallacy" to refer to "assigning intellectual processes as the springs of action" (McDougall 1960, 387), was a racist and a eugenicist. (Richards 1998, 153) Shortly after moving from Oxford to Harvard, he published a truly vile tract, "Is America Safe for Democracy?" sketching a "New Plan" to "favor increase in the birth-rate among the intrinsically better part of the population, and its decrease among the inferior part." (McDougall 1921, 192) "Anti-intellectualism" was also associated in the period between the two World Wars with the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes. Ryle would have encountered the phrase in his reading of the works of the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, early in his philosophical career. (Ryle 1970a, 3) Gentile would become an apologist for Mussolini, writing in *The Spectator* that "the condemnation of intellectualism may be said to have become the common denominator of all Fascist literature."<sup>17</sup> (Gentile 1928)

Perhaps because of these associations, Ryle *never* called himself an "anti-intellectualist," though that label is typically pinned on him in the current literature.<sup>18</sup> What our discussion of his arguments in "Reason" makes clear is that his distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, far from being intended to alienate and divide, was consciously opposed to a *form* of intellectualism which, as embodied in Stout's influential *Manual*, may have helped to prop up colonial oppression. Consequently, were Stanley to reject Ryle's distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that as divisive and alienating, he would come close to inverting the historical situation. Yet unless he can paint Ryle's distinction in this light, he has no ground for asserting that his "reasonable intellectualism" is *necessary* to

<sup>16</sup> On the life of Newton, see (Gleick 2003).

<sup>17</sup> I discuss this history, and Ryle's relation to Gentile, in more detail in "Ryle's 'Intellectualist Legend' in Historical Context."

<sup>18</sup> I argue in "Ryle's 'Intellectualist Legend' in Historical Context" that Ryle was charting a middle course between the "intellectualisms" and "anti-intellectualisms" of his day. Similarly, the rigid dichotomy between "intellectualist" and "anti-intellectualist" views on knowledge-how in the contemporary debate has obscured Ryle's own position from view.

save us from a flawed ideology. For Ryle's "reasonable non-intellectualism," as we might call it, offers the same benefits.

## VII. Conclusion

How might Stanley respond to the argument of this paper? A comparison might be made here to Stanley's discussion of another aspect of his earlier work in *How Propaganda Works*. In Chapter Five, "Political Ideologies," Stanley uses his theory of the interest-relativity of knowledge (or "pragmatic encroachment") to explain the way in which a flawed ideology prevalent in a society can lead to forms of epistemic injustice. Stanley's explanation turns on the idea that when the stakes are high for an individual in determining whether something is true, the justificatory bar they have to reach to be able to claim knowledge about this question is raised. This yields a situation in which oppressed groups find that they have to meet a higher bar to claim knowledge about their own oppression, which is thereby occluded. (Stanley 2015, 252-5) Similarly, since knowledge is the norm of assertion, members of oppressed groups find that their claims of oppression lack authority. (Stanley 2015, 261)

However, Stanley recognizes that there are alternative explanations of the phenomena which he takes to support the interest-relativity of knowledge, such as the view that raising the stakes does not raise the justificatory bar, but makes belief more difficult; the view that raising the stakes reduces the degree of belief; and the "error theory" according to which in high stakes situations there is still knowledge but it is misperceived as a lack of knowledge. (Stanley 2015, 256-8) In response, Stanley argues that "it is not relevant" whether knowledge is interest-relative, since "every competing explanation also results in a very similar and equally destructive form of epistemic debilitation," and that "the knowledge norm of assertion, together with the interest-relativity of knowledge, or any of the suggested alternatives, entails that negatively privileged groups will be severely hindered in democratic deliberation." (Stanley 2015, 255, 261)

Similarly, Stanley might reply to my challenge that the core of his critique of the ideology of elites remains unaffected, since his argument will go through whether we accept his intellectualist position or Ryle's form of non-intellectualism. Stanley's objection is to a form of anti-intellectualism that supports a sharp distinction between manual labor and intellectual work, a distinction which is congealed into the structure of an educational system strictly separating vocational training and liberal education. If both Stanley's intellectualism, and Ryle's non-intellectualism undercut such a strict separation, so much the better, from the point of view of Stanley's political argument.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, I think this is the correct response for Stanley to make. However, making it concedes the main point of this paper. Ryle's views on knowledge do not have the invidious political consequences of supporting a flawed ideology. Indeed Ryle offers arguments aimed at a hyper-intellectualism which functioned to provide such a support. Consequently, both "hyper-intellectualist" views assimilating knowledge-how to an overly-intellectualized conception of knowledge-that, and "anti-intellectualist" views relying on a misconceived form of Ryle's distinction between the practical and the theoretical, are amenable to the kind of

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<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous referee in this paragraph.

ideological misuse that Stanley wishes to eschew. Ryle's own position, however, provides an ideologically benign viable alternative to Stanley's reasonable intellectualism. Therefore, the debate over the nature of knowledge-how turns out not to have the political weightiness claimed for it by Stanley.

We appear, then, to have arrived at a stalemate. For, after all, I have *not* provided any reason to *prefer* the Rylean account over Stanley's view. But I close with a pair of questions. When a college professor proposes to explain how plumbers are the equals of college professors by arguing that the plumber's knowledge of plumbing really just is the same sort of thing as what the college professor specializes in producing — "intellectual recognition of truths" — and that it is "only when [it] is guided by" such recognition that the plumber's behavior "deserves to be called 'intelligent'" (Stanley 2011b, 190) — how thankful should the plumber be for such assistance? Wouldn't our plumber perhaps prefer a position like Ryle's, which fully recognizes the dignity of his plumbing knowledge, without equating it with another kind of thing?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Compare the title of another New York Times opinion piece co-authored by Stanley and John Krakauer, "Is the 'Dumb Jock' Really a Nerd?" (Stanley and Krakauer 2013) They argue "that motor skill, like any other cognitive task, requires knowledge," but they presume that the only way to hold this is to take the knowledge involved to be propositional, neglecting the Rylean alternative account. Again there appears the suggestion that the "jock" can only avoid being "dumb" by being "really a nerd." And again one wonders why the jock — say a member of Ryle's St. John's rowing team — should accept this equation of their athletic knowledge with the kind of knowledge that nerdy philosophy professors produce and possess.



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