



International Journal of Humanities and Education Research

www.humanitiesjournal.net

Online ISSN: 2664-9802; Print ISSN: 2664-9799; Impact Factor: RJIF 5.46

Received: 01-10-2021, Accepted: 25-10-2021, Published: 03-11-2021

Volume 3; Issue 2, 2021; Page No. 20-23

On Ryle's knowing how and knowing that

Dr. Shambhu Dutt Jha

Professor, Philosophy Department, Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.33545/26649799.2021.v3.i2a.56>

Abstract

Ryle tells us that knowing how does not involve knowing that. Knowing how to perform a task does not require a prior knowing that in the sense of avowing to oneself certain propositions about what is to be done. The champions of the traditional theory had, according to Ryle, interpreted knowing how in terms of knowing that by arguing that intelligent performance involved a double operation of considering appropriate propositions internally and executing them publicly. But the important point, according to Ryle, is that in the case of knowing how, we are not having knowledge of this or that truth but simply displaying the ability to do certain sorts of things. He observes: "When a person is described by one or other of the intelligence- epithets such as 'shrewd', or 'silly', 'prudent' or 'imprudent', the description imputes to him not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but the ability, or inability, to do certain sorts of things'. In order to defend such a view, he contrasts knowing how with knowing that. The contrast becomes evident when he declares: "It should be noticed that the boy is not said to know how to play, if all he can do is to recite the rules accurately.

Keywords: Oneself, traditional, arguing, displaying, prudent, silly

Introduction

In the chapter 'Knowing How and Knowing That' in *The Concept of Mind*, Professor Ryle aims at establishing 'that there are many activities which directly display qualities of mind, yet are neither themselves intellectual operations nor yet effects of intellectual operations'. He refuses to agree with the traditionalists that Intellectual operations and attainment of knowledge of truths are the defining characteristics of mind. In order to show that mind does not necessarily consist in the apprehension of truths or knowledge of true propositions, he distinguishes between Knowing how and Knowing that. By stressing certain non-parallelisms between knowing how and knowing that, he makes it plain that knowing how is a disposition to act in a certain way under appropriate situation. 'John Knows how to swim' means only this much that John has a disposition or capacity to swim actually if he is ever required to do so. The several illustrations of knowing how that Ryle provides go to show that he assimilates knowing how to the model 'Knowing how to perform a task'. Contrary to expectations, however, he does not make the logical status of knowing that as explicit as that of knowing how. He, however, assimilates knowing that to the model 'Knowing that such and such is the case'. In short, Ryle maintains that knowing how means knowing how to

perform skilful acts and knowing that means knowing propositions of factual nature.

With the help of the above distinction between knowing how and knowing that, Ryle tells us that knowing how does not involve knowing that. Knowing how to perform a task does not require a prior knowing that in the sense of avowing to oneself certain propositions about what is to be done. The champions of the traditional theory had, according to Ryle, interpreted knowing how in terms of knowing that by arguing that intelligent performance involved a double operation of considering appropriate propositions internally and executing them publicly. But the important point, according to Ryle, is that in the case of knowing how, we are not having knowledge of this or that truth but simply displaying the ability to do certain sorts of things. He observes: "When a person is described by one or other of the intelligence- epithets such as 'shrewd', or 'silly', 'prudent' or 'imprudent', the description imputes to him not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but the ability, or inability, to do certain sorts of things'. In order to defend such a view, he contrasts knowing how with knowing that. The contrast becomes evident when he declares: "It should be noticed that the boy is not said to know how to play, if all he can do is to recite the rules accurately. He must be able to make the required moves. But

he is said to know how to play if, although he cannot cite the rules, he normally does make the permitted moves. His knowledge how is exercised primarily in the moves that he makes, or concedes, and in the moves that he avoids or vetoes. So long as he can observe the rules, we do not care if he cannot also formulate them". This shows that for Ryle certain kinds of performance are necessary and sufficient for knowing how and the ability to state anything is not relevant. Ryle's crucial objection against the view that an intelligent performance must be 'preceded and steered by another internal act of considering a regulative proposition', is that it lands one into infinite regress. If knowing how is made to depend on knowing that, infinite regress would be unavoidable. If an observable operation is considered to be intelligent by virtue of a prior consideration of a regulative proposition, the prior consideration of a regulative proposition being an operation is ex hypothesi made intelligent by virtue of a still prior consideration of a regulative proposition and so on ad infinitum. Therefore, any attempt to re-assimilate knowing how to knowing that by arguing that an intelligent performance involves two processes, one of doing and another of theorizing, is bound to suffer from an endless regress. Ryle thinks that if this regress is to be avoided, knowing how is not to be interpreted in terms of knowing that. He argues that the logic of the two are different and as such many activities may be mental without being intellectual.

Knowing How and Knowing That

It is obvious that Ryle utilizes the divergent logic of knowing how and knowing that in rejecting the traditional concept of mind. He purports to establish that theorizing is not essentially connected with the display of mental qualities because he believes that "the combination of two assumptions that theorizing is the primary activity of minds and that theorizing is intrinsically a private, silent or internal operation remains one of the main supports of the dogma of the ghost in the machine". In this connection, while it would be proper to acknowledge that Ryle has performed a great analytical task in shedding light on the logical status of 'Know', it would still raise doubts whether his distinction between knowing how and knowing that is valid. It is true that knowing how and knowing that are often used to mean 'Know how to perform a task' and 'Know that such and such is the case'. But this is not always true. In this connection, we may do no better than to quote the views of some English speaking critics. Jane Roland says, "...in ordinary language the phrase 'Knowing how is often used when performances are not involved and the phrase 'Knowing that is found in sentences which do not refer to knowing actual propositions. For example, we say 'Johnny knows how a motor car works', 'I know how Eisenhower felt on election night' and 'John knows how the accident happened'. We also say, 'Smith knows that he ought to be honest', 'The child knows that he should be quiet when some one is speaking' and 'Johnny knows that stealing is bad'. None of these examples fits Ryle's paradigms of 'Knowing how' or 'Knowing that'. His distinction is more of a limited nature". D. G. Brown expresses a similar view when he writes: "He gives many clear examples on both sides. The difficulty is rather, for each kind of knowing, to find out what is not an example. What is obscure is the boundary of each

class and as a result, the principle of division itself". It is perhaps on account of the unascertainable nature of the boundary that Ryle himself gives the impression that "...he sometimes, but not always, used the words 'Knowing how' for much more than knowing how to do things, and the words 'Knowing that' for much less than knowing that something is the case". John Hartland-Swann has to say something more radical than this. He holds "that, although there is a prima facie distinction between these two uses of 'Know', knowing that is nevertheless merely a special case (or sub-category) of knowing how". According to him, all 'Knowing that' statements can be legitimately reduced to knowing how statements. For example, 'I know that the earth is round', can be analysed as 'I know how to reply correctly to the question "what shape is the earth?"'. If 'Know' is a capacity verb, as Ryle has taken it to be, Swann's reduction of knowing that' statements into 'knowing how statements seems to be justified. It is, however, true, as Swann thinks, that the statement 'I know that the earth is round' is not on a par with the statement 'I know how to swim'. But this is because different kinds of capacity are involved in them. The capacity to state correctly what is the case is not like the capacity to swim. Not only this. In Swann's opinion, it might also be argued that the phrase 'I know French', an obvious case of knowing how, does not only imply the possession of certain abilities, competences or skills, it 'implies also the actual knowledge that the French word for knife is *Couteau*, for boy is *garçon* and so on'. So, the phrases 'Knowing how' and 'Knowing that' are full of complexities. The distinction or non-parallelism between them, as drawn by Ryle, cannot be ultimately maintained. And if the know/that dichotomy cannot be maintained, it cannot also be argued that knowing how straightway displays the qualities of mind without in any way involving knowing that.

Ryle Does Not

There are other considerations also which arise in this context. Ryle does not deny that we do often consider propositions before acting intelligently. What he denies is the view that such considerations are invariably and necessarily required in order to act intelligently. He asserts: "Certainly we often do not only reflect before we act but reflect in order to act properly. The chess-player may require sometime in which to plan his moves before he makes them. Yet the general assertion that all intelligent performance requires to be prefaced by the consideration of appropriate propositions rings unacceptably, even when it is apologetically conceded that the required consideration is often very swift and may go quite unmarked by the agent". He also holds that the acquisition of knowing how or skills generally involves knowing that or knowledge of propositions. About the boy learning to play chess, he deserves, "the boy now begins to learn the game properly, and this generally involves his receiving explicit instruction in the rules.... But very soon he comes to observe the rules without thinking of them." As is obvious from these observations, Ryle does not deny the importance or relevance of knowledge of propositions in the performance of skilful acts. But once a place to the consideration of propositions is conceded, even in some cases, it becomes difficult to get rid of the view that there are some mental events or processes which consist in that considering", a view which Ryle tries

hard to refute on the basis of the dichotomy between knowing how and knowing that. Prof. Ewing is of the view that "since Prof. Ryle does not deny that we do consider propositions, presumably the argument is only intended as a warning against exaggerating their role. But in that case it cannot be used as an objection to the privileged access view".

Intelligent Activity

Ryle, of course, is right in saying that an intelligent activity does not always require a prior consideration of the rules of the activity. It is certainly not true that the chef has to 'recite his recipes to himself before he can cook according to them; or the hero has to 'lend his inner ear to some appropriate moral imperative before swimming out to save the drowning man', or the chess-player has to 'run over in his head all the relevant rules and tactical maxims of the game before he can make correct and skilful moves'. But this does not either establish that the intelligent activity of Cooking, saving or playing is possible without considering any proposition at all or the rules for the performance of the activity are at any time completely lost. A mindful Cook has to act by saying to himself some such proposition as 'The meat now stands roasted' or 'the potato requires further boiling', etc. Similarly, an intelligent chess-player has to consider many propositions before moving his chess-man on the chess-board. The considerations of such propositions are conscious happenings or non-extended occurrences. But this need not compel us to say that the agent has also to consider propositions embodying rules or maxims or imperatives of the activity every time on his conscious level before acting. For, once the rules are gone over during first few acts, they may become part of the agent's life and remain largely dispositional. But even then what the agent knows in this dispositional way is subtly actualised, as the situation requires, from moment to moment, in conscious processes in his understanding'. That is, although the agent does not consider rules or maxims, he goes 'through an intense mental activity of concentrating with 20 acute understanding on what he is doing'. Ryle has argued that a disposition actualises in overt acts. But to say so is to lay an undue emphasis on the overt aspect of it for a disposition may be both a disposition to act overtly as well as to reflect on the act covertly. Frank Sibley using rightly questions the propriety of wing dispositions to 21 mean at least predominantly overt acts.

Traditional View

As we have seen above, Ryle finds an infinite regress in the traditional view that an intelligent performance consists of considering propositions and applying them into activity. For, according to Ryle, if any performance is intelligent by virtue of the consideration of propositions, the consideration of propositions being itself a performance must be ex hypothesi intelligent by virtue of the consideration of another set of propositions and soon indefinitely. Now, it is not difficult to see that Ryle's infinite regress argument is possible because of resumes three things: (i) That mind is a series of distinct isolable episodes - consideration of one set, another set, Set still another, and so on of propositions. (ii) That an intelligent activity consists of doing two separate things, one preceding the other first considering propositions and then executing them. (iii) If any process is postulated beyond a physical one,

it must at least be like the latter. If a physical process is intelligent because of the prior consideration of propositions, the prior consideration of propositions, a process beyond a physical one, must be intelligent by virtue of the same criterion, via, the consideration of a still prior set of propositions. All these assumptions are, however, unwarranted. Why should one presume that mind is a mere series of different bits of isolable episodes as walking which is a mere series of different steps? We all know that mind has been conceived to be a subtly changing flow of variegated events. At any particular time one is conscious of many things. If I am at the moment thinking of philosophy, which is in the forefront of my mind, I am also aware of my hand holding the pen and I also glimpse and note the marks as they appear on the paper and so on. Instead of envisaging it as a series of distinct isolable episodes, as Professor Ryle has done, mind has well been compared to a flowing stream in which there are many currents, whirls and eddies. It is also not true that an intelligent activity consists of two isolable processes- one preceding and another succeeding as Ryle has taken the traditionalists' theory of to mean. There are indeed two processes involved. "But the dual process involved is not that of one act preceding the another my doing two things instead of one etc - but of the one act having a mental component and a physical one ". The intelligent activity is one act and we do it in the capacity of being single individuals doing the act rather than being divided against ourselves in the capacity of considering propositions and executing them. As to Ryle's assumption that if there be any extra-physical process, it must be like the physical one, we may observe that this is the outcome of a basic presupposition lingering in Ryle's mind that there is only one world, the physical world that we experience. This was, however, a subject for his proof, not for his presupposition. It is obvious that an extra-physical process cannot be a process in the sense in which a physical process is, because it is not at all in space or quasi-space. So, Ryle cannot introduce infinite regress by arguing that an intelligent consideration of proposition has to be preceded by yet another consideration of propositions and so on indefinitely. There are indeed two processes involved. "But the dual process involved is not that of one act preceding the another my doing two things instead of one etc - but of the one act having a mental component and a physical one ". So, Ryle cannot introduce infinite regress by arguing that an intelligent consideration of proposition has to be preceded by yet another consideration of propositions and so on indefinitely. The intelligent activity is one act and we do it in the capacity of being single individuals doing the act rather than being divided against ourselves in the capacity of considering propositions and executing them. As to Ryle's assumption that if there be any extra-physical process, it must be like the physical one, we may observe that this is the outcome of a basic presupposition lingering in Ryle's mind that there is only one world, the physical world that we experience. This was, however, a subject for his proof, not for his presupposition. It is obvious that an extra-physical process cannot be a process in the sense in which a physical process is, because it is not at all in space or quasi-space.

References

1. Lewis HD. The Elusive Mind, George Allen and Unwin. p. 51.
2. Prank Sibley. Review of Metaphysics; c1950 December. p. 267.
3. The Concept of Mind, p.29. The Concept of Mind, p.29.
4. op. cit. p. 53.
5. Lewis HD. The Elusive Mind, George Allen & Unwin, p. 53
6. Ibid., p. 40-41.
7. The Concept of Mind. p. 29.
8. Ewing AC. Prof. Ryle's attack on Dualism', P.A.S. Vol. III.
9. The Concept of Mind, p.29.
10. The Concept of Mind, p. 133.
11. John Hartland-Swann, Analysis of Thinking, p.57.
12. Jane Roland, On Knowing how and Knowing that
13. Philosophical Review, July, 1958. D. G. Brown, Knowing How and Knowing that, What, Ryle, Ed. Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher, p. 216.
14. Ibid., p.217.
15. John Hartland-Swann, An Analysis of Knowing, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., p.56.
16. op. cit., p.27.
17. op. cit., p.27.
18. op. cit., p.41.
19. op. cit., p.31.
20. The Concept of Mind, p. 26.