

# The Pragmatism of Ramsey and Ryle

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**Abstract** Gilbert Ryle's dispositional account of knowledge and anti-intellectualism are often taken to be in the spirit of the later Wittgenstein, who was coming to similar ideas in the 1940s. This paper traces Ryle's position to Frank Ramsey in the late 1920s and, along the way, suggests that Wittgenstein's ideas had the same root. Ryle's argument that knowledge is best seen not as knowledge that *p*, but as knowledge of how to do things, and is assessed as such is a kind of pragmatism.

## Introduction

Ronnie de Sousa has expressed a passing, if slightly sceptical, interest in pragmatism ever since I met him when I was an undergraduate at the University of Lethbridge in the early 1980s, where he had come to teach a summer course. This paper is designed to offer him a reason for re-thinking pragmatism—of a kind about which he might be less sceptical. As Ronnie might put it, we are animals trying to make our way in the world, and if we want to engage in a philosophical study of belief and its aims, we had better start with that fact. The pragmatism I want to offer Ronnie is that of Frank Ramsey, and Gilbert Ryle. The latter has not been thought of as a pragmatist and I aim to change that misperception.

Ryle was the dominant force in Oxford philosophy last mid-century. *The Concept of Mind* was published in 1949, upending traditional thinking of the mind as a ghostly machine and promoting a conception of the mind in terms of dispositions to act. On Ryle's account, the mind is a set of habits and laws or rules are inference tickets. The book was taken to be 'perhaps the first systematic and really large-scale application of the new philosophical style to large traditional problems' (Warnock 1969: 10-11). That new philosophical style was taken to be ordinary language philosophy. We will see that Ryle certainly changed his way of doing philosophy rather abruptly in the late 1930s.

Where did Ryle and the other rebels (J.L. Austin, H.L.A. Hart) get their interest in rules, habits, and dispositions? Indeed, where did they get their interest in ordinary language as the answer to philosophical problems? Wittgenstein is certainly relevant. He was at the time exploring the idea that rule-following bottoms out in behaviour. Two sets of mimeographed notes taken during his Cambridge lectures in 1933-35 were in circulation,

known as the Blue Book and the Brown Book.<sup>1</sup> A copy of the Blue Book, at least, had made its way across the gulf that then stretched between Cambridge and Oxford. Indeed, Wittgenstein accused Ryle of plagiarizing him. Bouwsma reports him as saying that ‘Ryle had been good when he was young. Now he just borrowed other men’s thoughts’ (i.e. his own) (Bouwsma 1986:50).

But there was much in Wittgenstein’s position that repelled Ryle. There were two kinds of philosophers in Oxford in the 1940s and 50s—the fans of Wittgenstein and those who disdained the fans of Wittgenstein. After meeting Wittgenstein in 1929, Ryle was for a time caught up in the *Tractatus*. But by the 1940s, he was in the anti-Wittgenstein camp, so colourfully expressed by Isaiah Berlin after Wittgenstein’s death:

The Wittgenstein intimates – Miss Anscombe, her husband Geach, and others – were thinking of founding a colony in order to live, think, eat and be like Ludwig. Originally it was intended to invite L. himself, but now that he is dead they propose to establish it anyhow. A great deal of violent artificial neurosis, not washing etc., anyhow you can imagine – hideous stammering in place of articulate speech, perverted Catholicism and all the other delicious attributes. (Berlin 2009: 229).

Disdaining someone’s disciples of course does not preclude being influenced by the master. But Ryle was set against Wittgenstein’s idea that the purpose of philosophy is therapeutic, with an aim to giving up on the philosophy addiction. Ryle was putting forward a philosophical theory about the mind. Wittgenstein maintained that he was not putting forward a theory of the mind, never mind a scientific one. Both were an anathema to him.

I will argue that Ryle got his new philosophy from exposure to the old ideas of American pragmatism. Some of those ideas came directly from the source—from the founder of pragmatism, C.S. Peirce. Some came from one of Peirce’s greatest successors, Frank Ramsey in Cambridge, who died at the age of 26 in 1930. Some did indeed come from Wittgenstein, but he got them from Ramsey, and mangled them in translation.<sup>2</sup>

## **Pragmatism**

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<sup>1</sup> They were published together in 1958, after Wittgenstein’s death in 1951.

<sup>2</sup> See Misak (2016) for this argument.

Pragmatism aims to understand philosophical concepts, traditionally treated very abstractly, through the examination of their place in the concrete human practices of inquiry, action, contestation, adjudication, and judgment. It tells us that when we analyse a concept (truth, belief, probability, induction), we must ask how we use it, or what is meant by the concept, not ask for its logical analysis. As Peirce put it in 1900, ‘we must not begin by talking of pure ideas,— vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human habitation,—but must begin with men and their conversation’ (Peirce CP 8. 112). For instance, a philosophical account of truth must take seriously the idea that truth is that at which belief and inquiry aim. Once we do that, we will reject the fruitless quest to ground truth and objectivity in high metaphysics, a supernatural God, an all-powerful sovereign, or some other absolute ideal. On Peirce’s account, truth is what would be indefeasible—the best that humans could achieve.

Ryle had Peirce’s massive *Collected Papers* (which started to be published by Harvard University Press in 1931) in his personal library.<sup>3</sup> While many an Oxford philosophy don will have had the popular William James on their bookshelves, a sighting of Peirce’s *Collected Papers* in Oxford would have been rare. Ryle roamed through Peirce’s sprawling work and occasionally marked up exactly the passages one would expect him to be interested in. He liked Peirce’s comment that in metaphysics ‘one finds those questions that at first seem to offer no handle for reason’s clutch.’ He liked Peirce’s criticisms of Cartesian ‘counterfeit, paper doubts’, and Peirce’s alternative view that we start where we find ourselves, laden with a body of undoubted belief and methods for improving them. (Peirce CP 6.463; 6.498).

But Ryle’s pragmatist lineage comes also via one of Peirce’s greatest successors: the Cambridge pragmatist Frank Ramsey. When the first collection of some papers of Peirce’s appeared in 1922, Ramsey immersed himself in it. He found it congenial. From 1926, he started to call himself a pragmatist, citing Peirce (and Russell’s causal theory of knowledge in *The Analysis of Mind*). One thing he shared with Peirce was an account of concepts and definition that turned on use. In a 1929 paper titled ‘Philosophy’, Ramsey disagrees with all the usual accounts of definitions. He disagrees with Moore that definitions ‘explain what we have hitherto meant by our propositions’. He proposes an alternative view of definitions: ‘they show how we intend to use them in the future’. (Ramsey 1929b [1990]: 1) A definition tells us how to *go on* using a term by making more precise the vague and complex concept it already stands for. Meaning, Ramsey says, ‘is mainly potential’. Definitions ‘fix our future

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<sup>3</sup> Four of the eight volumes are still in the Ryle collection: I, III, V, and VI. Many of Ryle’s books have gone missing, for at one time they were in general circulation in the library of Linacre College. He had given his library to Linacre, as it was a new college, without books.

meaning'. (Ramsey 1929b [1990]: 1) They do not 'merely' give us 'a pretty way of obtaining a certain structure'. Wittgenstein and Carnap engage in 'excessive scholasticism' (Ramsey 1929b [1990]: 1). We have to turn away from that approach and see 'the vagueness of the whole idea of understanding, the reference it involves to a multitude of performances any of which may fail and require to be restored' (Ramsey 1929b [1990]: 2).

Ramsey thinks Wittgenstein (and Carnap's) approach to philosophy is 'wrong'. He explains how he 'parts company' with it'. Wittgenstein and Carnap look to nail down the meanings of words to existing objects and Ramsey rejects the narrowness of such an approach. In an effort to maintain purity or objectivity, it leaves out generalizations and conditionals (Ramsey's 'variable hypotheticals', as well as theoretical terms in science:

In the process of clarifying our thought we come to terms and sentences which we cannot elucidate in the obvious manner by defining their meaning. For instance, variable hypotheticals and theoretical terms we cannot define, but we can explain the way they are used, and in this explanation we are forced to look not only at the objects which we are talking about, but at our own mental states. ... in this part of logic we cannot neglect the epistemic or subjective side'. (Ramsey 1929b [1990]: 6-7)

Ramsey also found in Peirce's work the idea that a belief involves the establishment of a habit or general rule. Beliefs, Peirce argued, are individuated in terms of action: 'What the habit is depends on *when* and *how* it causes us to act' (Peirce W3: 265). Ramsey also found in Peirce the argument that 'our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires' (Peirce CP 5.375) and that 'the whole function of thought is to produce habits of action' (Peirce CP 5.400). Notice that he says that a habit produces action, not that it is reducible to action (see also Peirce CP 2.664).

For Ramsey, as for Peirce, the 'meaning of a sentence is to be defined by reference to the actions to which asserting it would lead' (Ramsey 1927 [1990]: 51); 'The ultimate purpose of thought is to guide our action' (Ramsey 1929a [1990]: 153); 'It belongs to the essence of any belief that we deduce from it, and act on it in a certain way' (Ramsey 1929a [1990]: 159). Belief, Ramsey argued, involves a habit or disposition to behave.

He gives the following example. If a chicken 'believes' that a certain caterpillar is poisonous, it abstains from eating that kind of caterpillar on account of the unpleasant experiences associated with that behaviour. But the chicken's behaviour has to be

somehow related to the objective factors, viz. the kind of caterpillar and poisonousness. An exact analysis of this relation would be very difficult, but it might well be held that in regard to this kind of belief the pragmatist view was correct, i.e. that the relation between the chicken's behaviour and the objective factors was that the actions were such as to be useful if, and only if, the caterpillars were actually poisonous. (1927 [1990: 40)]<sup>4</sup>

Ramsey puts forward a pragmatist account of meaning or content, i.e. what it is that makes one belief equivalent to another. Beliefs are marked out or individuated by the actions they cause (as well as the input-states that cause them). What it is that makes one belief equivalent to another is that the beliefs have 'in common many of their causes and many of their effects' (1927 [1990: 44]):

To be equivalent . . . is to have in common certain causal properties, which I wish I could define more precisely. Clearly, they are not at all simple; there is no uniform action which believing 'p' will always produce. It may lead to no action at all, except in particular circumstances, so that its causal properties will only express what effects result from it when certain other conditions are fulfilled. And, again, only certain sorts of causes and effects must be admitted; for instance, we are not concerned with the factors determining, and the results determined by, the rhythm of the words. (1927 [1990: 44]).

In later papers, Ramsey drops examples about chickens and sticks to examples of human belief. His view is that 'the importance of beliefs and disbeliefs lies not in their intrinsic nature, but in their causal properties, i.e. their causes and more especially their effects' (Ramsey 1927 [1990: 44]).

As with Peirce, beliefs, on Ramsey's view, are not reducible to behaviour, for there is still a mental factor—an internal state of consciousness involved. A belief is not simply its causes and effects. Ramsey is clear that there are other aspects of a belief, for instance, that it is a 'feeling'. But:

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<sup>4</sup> That last sentence is less than straightforward. One thing it seems to convey is that if a belief leads to successful action, the belief is true—and yet that action will be successful only if the belief is related in the right way to objective factors. This is reminiscent of Peirce's view in 'The Fixation of Belief', where he said that a belief that always would prove successful would be true, but the belief must be determined by circumstances not extraneous to the facts. It's not clear whether Ramsey was fully on board with Peirce's account of truth, but he was certainly attracted to it.

It is evident that the importance of beliefs and disbeliefs lies not in their intrinsic nature, but in their causal properties. For why should I want to have a feeling of belief towards names ‘*a*’, ‘*R*’, and ‘*b*’, when *aRb*, and of disbelief when not-*aRb*, except because the effects of these feelings are more often satisfactory than those of the alternative ones. (1927 [1990: 44]).

The ‘intrinsic nature’ or the mental factors are not important for philosophy, since they are so elusive. Only the behavioural factor gives us a handle— something we can grab onto.

Moreover, the causal role of beliefs is a holistic matter: what a given belief causes someone to do in a given situation will depend on all the other things the person believes and desires. A belief combines with some set of desires, and the action following from it is successful only if the belief is true. And Ramsey did not think that the truth of a belief *guarantees* successful action. For there may be all sorts of obstacles and mistakes that lead someone to act wrongly on a true belief, or accidents that make people act successfully on a false belief. The causal role of beliefs is a complex and holistic matter. What a given belief causes someone to do in a given situation will depend on all the other things the person believes and desires. And a belief can be true and still cause unsuccessful actions, because false beliefs may also play a role in causing those actions. Ramsey notes that a belief may lead to no action at all: ‘in the course of trains of thought we believe many things which do not lead to action’. What he asserts is that a belief *would* lead to action in suitable circumstances—‘we are concerned with dispositional rather than with actualized beliefs’ (1926 [1990: 66, 68]).

While any philosophical account of semantic notions and concepts must display the underpinning of our linguistic activities by the successes or failures of our practices, Ramsey recognized (as clearly as contemporary thinkers) that this underpinning relation is very complex. We find him, for instance, in his notes on his discussions with Moore, distancing himself from the view that semantics is all about causal role:

Moore thinks I mean to analyse negative facts in terms of disappointed expectations  
no I do not [Ramsey 1991:128–9]

In other notes, Ramsey deploys a well-known Jamesian metaphor against extreme behaviourism. Any viable ‘construction of the fundamental epistemological concepts,

‘meaning’, ‘acquaintance’, ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’, etc.’ needs to be centrally concerned with, and to work toward an analysis of, a ‘stream of experience’. And ‘any system such as behaviourism which does not include experience is evidently wrong or at least incomplete’ (Ramsey 1991: 52). Ramsey had in mind a strong behaviourism, against which he wanted to contrast his own position. On this strong view, meaning and mental states consist solely in behaviour (and behavioural dispositions). Ramsey thought that behaviourism leaves out something important. It leaves out experience:

I do not believe other people are automata; for I use my experience to forecast their action, and to eliminate experience from this process of inference and recast it in terms of unknown bodily states would be too far fetched. (Ramsey 1991: 68)

Behaviourism, Ramsey says, ‘is not false as far as I know; but it is ‘insane’’ (Ramsey 1991: 70). Ramsey had no eliminativist tendencies.

### **Ryle and Ramsey**

Ryle and Ramsey were contemporaries. Ramsey was born in 1903, Ryle in 1900. Both started their undergraduate courses in 1919, Ramsey at 17 years of age in Cambridge, Ryle at 19 years at Oxford. In 1924, immediately after his undergraduate studies, Ryle got a Lectureship in Philosophy at Christ Church.<sup>5</sup> Ramsey too was snapped up in this year by King’s College, Cambridge. We think of Ryle as being of a different generation than Ramsey only because Ramsey died at the age of 26 in 1930 and Ryle went on to a long and influential career, as a two-decade Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy and a two-decade editor of *Mind*. He died in 1976.

Ryle and Ramsey may have met. On November 29, 1929, just before Ramsey took fatally ill, Ryle journeyed to Cambridge to give a talk at the Moral Sciences Club, at which Ramsey was a regular attendee. The minutes of the MSC don’t say who was present (on this occasion there were 25 members listening to Ryle). Ryle’s topic, however, was ‘The Programme of Phenomenology’, something that didn’t much interest Ramsey. They were very different philosophers at the time. Ramsey had done his undergraduate degree in mathematics and was a mathematics don. His passion was the white-hot philosophical atmosphere of the Cambridge of Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein. He had been, at the age of

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<sup>5</sup> In 1945, he became Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy and fellow of Magdalen College.

19, the translator of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and knew that work better than anyone else. That was the philosophical air he breathed: technical, sparse, logical.

Ryle was into phenomenology and ancient philosophy. His undergraduate teachers distained what was happening in Cambridge. But Ryle was starting to find the Oxford scene dreary:

During my time as an undergraduate and during my first years as a teacher, the philosophical kettle in Oxford was barely lukewarm. I think that it would have been stone cold but for Prichard, who did bring into his chosen and rather narrow arenas vehemence, tenacity, unceremoniousness, and a perverse consistency that made our hackles rise as nothing else at that time did. The Bradleians were not yet extinct, but they did not come out into the open. I cannot recollect hearing one referring mention of the Absolute. The Cook Wilsonians were hankering to gainsay the Bradleians and the Croceans, but were given few openings. . . . Logic, save for Aristotelian scholarship, was in the doldrums. . . . Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* . . . and *Principia Mathematica* were still only the objects of Oxonian pleasantries. . . . The two branches in which there was some life were ethics and the theory of sense perceptions. It was from a consuming interest in sense perception that Henry Price, with heroic sangfroid, migrated for a post-graduate spell to the university of Moore, Russell, and Broad. He thus made himself our first personal and doctrinal link with 'the other place', and launched the idea that young Oxford should learn from Cambridge. Soon Oxford's hermetically conserved atmosphere began to smell stuffy even to ourselves. (Ryle 1970: 4-5).

Ryle found the Oxford realists Joseph and Pritchard boring and domineering. One thing they did was drum out any talk of pragmatism, which was easy to do, since the resident champion of that tradition was both personally and philosophically irritating. Ryle recalled: 'Pragmatism was still represented by F. C. S. Schiller, but as his tasteless jocosities beat vainly against the snubbing primnesses of his colleagues, even this puny spark was effectually quenched' (Ryle 1970: 4-5).

Looking for work on the nature or argument and reasoning in Oxford and finding none, Ryle 'went all Cambridge':

Having no mathematical ability, equipment or interest, I did not make myself even competent in the algebra of logic; nor did the problem of the foundations of mathematics become a question that burned in my belly. My interest was in the theory of Meanings ... and quite soon ... in the theory of its senior partner, Nonsense. I laboured upon the doublets – Sense and Reference, Intension and Extension, Concept and Object, Propositions and Constituents, Objectives and Objects, Facts and Things, Formal Concepts and Real Concepts, Proper Names and Descriptions, and Subjects and Predicates. It was in Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* and not in his *Principia Mathematica*, in his Meinong articles and his 'On Denoting,' that I found the pack-ice of logical theory cracking. It was up these cracks that Wittgenstein steered his *Tractatus*. (Ryle 1970: 7).

The 1930s were the decade that logical positivism excised its influence and Ryle thought there was 'something very important, though still disordered in the Principle of Verifiability (and Falsifiability)' Ryle (1970: 10). Ryle was one of the 'anti-nonsense philosophers', but he was struggling to find his precise place in that broad swath of positions, which included Wittgenstein's early view in the *Tractatus*, the logical positivist's verifiability principle, and pragmatism. That pragmatism was in the mix is clear in Ryle's next sentence: 'We were not yet talking in the obsessive lingo of 'criteria'. But it's cash equivalents were already entering into our purchases and sales.' Criteria would come in with the later Wittgenstein. The reference to cash equivalents though, already present, Ryle tells us, in 1929, is to William James's well-known and frequently used idea that the meaning of an expression is its cash-value.<sup>6</sup> Ryle saw that Wittgenstein and the logical positivists were committed to the idea that all (Wittgenstein) or much (the logical positivists) of philosophy was nonsense. He found that rather problematic—a 'challenge' that had to be met (Ryle 1970: 10). The logical positivists' mantra of 'either science or nonsense' 'had too few 'ors' in it' (Ryle 1970: 10).

In 1929, Ramsey's intervention with respect to *Principia Mathematica*, his sophisticated critical notice of the *Tractatus*, and the papers 'Universals', and 'Facts and Propositions' were already published in prestigious journals. He was working on a book at terrific pace, writing drafts of what we know as 'Theories' and 'General Propositions and Causality' and meeting Wittgenstein almost every day. In those philosophical wrangles,

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<sup>6</sup> James employs it in *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*.

Ramsey was persuading Wittgenstein that the meaning of a statement is not a matter of its hooking on to objectively existing objects in the world. Meaning, rather, is tied to human use.

Ryle was slower off the mark (which is no discredit to him, as there is no word for Ramsey other than ‘prodigy’). But in the early 1930s, something happened to Ryle. He started to argue that in order to understand mental concepts, we have to look at human behaviour. Many people think that what happened to Ryle was Wittgenstein. But it was more like a combination of Ramsey, whose papers were posthumously published in 1931 under the title *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays* and the Ramsey-inflected Wittgenstein of the Blue and Brown books. That is, it was mostly Ramsey.

Looking back on his 1932 ‘Systematically Misleading Expressions’, he observed that ‘when I wrote I was still under the direct influence of the notion of an ‘ideal language’—a doctrine according to which there were a certain number of logical forms which one could somehow dig up by scratching away at the earth which covered them’ (Ryle 1961, 305). That is, in 1932, he was still under the influence of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Prompted by the ‘plot’ of the *Tractatus*, Ryle during these early years took it to be part of his job as a philosopher to say what philosophy is. An examination of the meanings of expressions and why and how certain expressions lack meaning was his answer (Ryle 1970: 6). He wasn’t satisfied with Wittgenstein’s conclusion that all philosophical expressions are nonsense and that his own nonsensical expressions must be climbed upon, like a ladder, and then kicked away once the meaninglessness of philosophy was reached. Ryle also thought that philosophy employs argumentation, something of which Wittgenstein (early and late) was never a fan.

It was after he read Ramsey, who had turned Wittgenstein away from his hankering after an ideal language, that Ryle too went in for naturalism. We can date Ryle’s proper introduction to Ramsey’s work in 1937, when Margaret MacDonald talked about Ramsey’s account of inductive inference at the joint session of the Aristotelian and Mind societies at which Ryle was also a panelist.<sup>7</sup> I surmise that after that session, Ryle read (and heavily annotated) Ramsey’s collected papers. For he picked up Ramsey’s exact terminology for some of his most important arguments.

By the late 1930s, Ryle saw that pragmatism was aligned with Cambridge philosophy. In a large red notebook, written in 1939 or 1940 (as he says that Wittgenstein is ‘now a Professor at Cambridge’), he penned a paper on what he called Anglo Saxon philosophy.<sup>8</sup> He

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<sup>7</sup> That is the subject of another paper.

<sup>8</sup> The notebook can be found in the Linacre College Archives.

asserted that pragmatism and Cambridge philosophy together formed a ‘trend’ in Anglo Saxon philosophy. That trend is ‘Matter-of-Fact-ism (a mood rather than a doctrine or practice).’ It is a kind of realism against ‘sermons’—against systematic theology and its philosophical cousins. Ryle approved of this trend, and he approved of pragmatism, except for James and Schiller’s subjectivist tendencies:

Pragmatism: one of the most vigorous lists of Matter-of-Fact-ism. James and Schiller said a lot that won’t do—but they said and said effectively, ‘Don’t stand up there talking to each other; come down to ground level and talk to us’ What is the Cash-Value of your differences of theory?

Another trend in Anglo-Saxon philosophy is empiricism:

This is perhaps only a special case of Matter-of-Fact-ism. ... Our only ways of knowing what exists or happens are by observation and experiment. Pure theory, whether of the style of Maths, or of the style of Theology, or of the style of Philosophy cannot give us news about the world.

That was where Ryle sat at the end of the 1930s. He would then get to work on his magnum opus, *The Concept of Mind*.

### ***The Concept of Mind***

Ryle’s answer to the question raised by Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle (What constitutes a philosophical problem and what is the best way to solve it?) was *The Concept of Mind*. He set out to give a sustained example of a certain kind of conceptual analysis, grounded in our practices of belief, assertion, and action.

Many of the central themes are from Ramsey. Ryle seems to have read all of the papers in the volume of Ramsey’s collected papers. But one attracts more marginalia than the others. It is the paper Braithwaite titled ‘General Propositions and Causality’, which is about so much more than that. (Ramsey had yet to title it.) Here’s what interested Ryle in that paper.

He highlighted Ramsey’s suggestion that generalizations and causal laws are rules for meeting the future:

*causal laws form the system with which the speaker meets the future; [they] are not judgments, but rules for judging 'If I meet a  $\phi$  I shall regard it as a  $\psi$ '; [a causal law is] not strictly a proposition at all, but a formula from which we derive propositions; I contend that ... it exhibits no feature called causal necessity, but that we make sentences called causal laws from which (i.e. having made which) we proceed to actions.*

These words of Ramsey's form a nice statement of Ryle's own account of rules and laws as inference tickets. Ryle argued in *The Concept of Mind* that

Law-statements are true or false but they do not state truths or falsehoods of the same type as those asserted by the statements of fact to which they apply... They have different jobs. ... At least part of the point of trying to establish laws is to find out how to infer from particular matters of fact to other particular matters of fact... A law is used, so to speak, as an inference ticket (a season ticket) which licences its possessors to move from asserting factual statements to asserting other factual statements. (Ryle 1949 [2009]: 121-22)

This is precisely Ramsey's concept of law. As Helen Beebe puts it, both Ramsey and Ryle think that hypotheticals express our inferential commitments. Causation, for Ramsey and Ryle is rooted in conditionals. She extends Ryle's metaphor to show how the view covers causation as well: 'we might think of causal laws not as season tickets but as vouchers that entitle the holder to an unlimited single-trip inference tickets'. (Beebe 2015:38)

Like Peirce and Ramsey, and all pragmatists, Ryle was set against mysterious objects. *The Concept of Mind* is full of arguments with a 'deflationary tendency' (Ryle 1949 [2009]: 255), against inflated conceptions of purpose, skill, the intellect, and so on that require special, ghostly, operations. Like Ramsey, he thought 'roughly, the mind is not the topic of sets of untestable categorical propositions, but the topic of sets of testable hypothetical and semi-hypothetical propositions' Ryle (1949 [2009]: 46). That 'roughly' is important, and indeed, we have seen that the qualification exists throughout Ramsey's work as well. Ramsey and Ryle weren't aiming to give a strict analysis of the mind and mental states such as beliefs. They aimed at giving us a realistic, workable account of them. Ryle's project is a 'democratisation of the offices of the old elite', whereby someone's quality of mind amounts to his being fond of animals, clever at philosopher, and so on (Ryle 1949 [2009]: 280).

Ryle employs a reduction ad absurdum and a regress argument against the 'intellectualist' who holds that all knowledge is or is reducible to knowing that some propositions are true.<sup>9</sup> His target is the idea that an act or a performance inherits its intelligence from some anterior internal operation of planning what to do. For instance, if I know that  $2+2=4$ , I know a rule about how to add. Ryle notes that the consideration of those propositions in the plan 'is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent ... But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle' (Ryle 1949 [1990]: 30). What is it that I know, if I know the rule? The regress argument attacks the idea that understanding my own behaviour as intelligent, or other people's behaviour as intelligent, is a matter of inferring or guessing the inner causes of their outer actions. But those prior operations themselves can be intelligent or non-intelligent. On we go with the regress.

Ryle also made a related reductio argument against the intellectualist. The intellectualist says that we can infer from people's actions that there are something like hidden or unknowable levers in unseen signal boxes of the mind causing those actions. But on the signal box analogy, it follows that 'no one has ever yet had the slightest understanding of what anyone else has ever said or done'. For in order to follow or understand someone, on this view, we have to infer something completely mysterious about the mind from what they do. And we can't make general inferences from the one case we supposedly have knowledge of (our own signal box) to those of others. Since it 'is patently absurd' that we don't have the slightest idea of what goes on in other people's minds, intellectualism is doomed (Ryle 1949 [2009]: 52). Rather, we should look to our practices as actions for an account of intelligence. In one of his many examples and analogies, Ryle notes that anyone who plays chess or football has a pretty good understanding of what the players are up to.

There is controversy over whether these are knock-down arguments or not (Stanley and Williamson (2001) think not). But philosophy need not proceed by knock-down argument, even if Ryle was of the view that it should. He is best seen as delivering a set of considerations against the idea that knowledge of propositions is the sole mode of knowledge and arguing that philosophy would do better to focus on capacities or 'knowledge how'. We

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<sup>9</sup> Lest the intellectualist be thought to be a straw person, see Stanley and Williamson 'Knowledge how is simply a species of knowledge that' (2001: 411).

don't know a concept unless we know how to use it and we don't know how to use it, unless we learn how to use it.

I hope to have suggested in this paper that Ryle's approach didn't come out of thin air. Nor did it come straight from Wittgenstein. It came from Peirce and Ramsey. Ryle, one pillar of Oxford Ordinary Language Philosophy, should be seen as a successor to that kind of pragmatism. I hope to show eventually that the other pillar, J.L. Austin, also has his feet planted firmly in the soil of pragmatism (not Ramsey's, but that of C.I. Lewis). That should place Oxford Ordinary Language Philosophy in a new light—one that will allow us to see what was good about it and where it went wrong.

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