

PRACTICAL MODES OF PRESENTATION. SOME REMARKS ON THE INTELLECTUALISM VS. ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM DEBATE

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Abstract: This paper is a critical examination of the notion of *practical mode of presentation* and of related notions that have been proposed in the literature as a way to explain the propositional character of practical knowledge. If all knowledge is propositional, as intellectualists maintain, then we need an elucidation of the situations where the subject knows some true propositions about an activity without knowing how to perform that activity. Intellectualists have appealed to practical modes of presentation in order to reply to this objection and account for the apparent difference between ordinary (propositional) knowledge and the knowledge that is manifested in practical cases. While this difference is undeniable, it is not substantial according to the intellectualists. The paper proceeds as a discussion of the debate between intellectualists and their critics regarding practical modes of presentation. The controversial character of practical modes of presentation is a key issue for understanding the entire intellectualism vs. anti-intellectualism debate and, more generally, the competing accounts allow a deeper and more nuanced construal of the connection(s) between knowledge and action. The main aim of the critical discussion in this paper is rather modest, but still significant at this point of the debate: as I will show, the debate is far from over and – for all the ingenuity and complexity of extant intellectualist accounts – supplementary work needs to be done to clarify the distinctions and develop a convincing and comprehensive account of practical modes of presentation.

Keywords: intellectualism, anti-intellectualism, knowledge-that, knowledge-how, practical modes of presentation

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Introduction. The sufficiency problem

Intellectualists hold that knowledge-how is propositional, i.e. x knows how to perform an activity F , according to Stanley and Williamson (2001), if x knows of a way w that w is a way for her to F . This tenet has been challenged from multiple perspectives, but one of the main lines of attack for anti-intellectualists has been the sufficiency objection, which states that, at least for some activities, knowledge of a certain proposition is not sufficient for one to possess the know-how needed to perform the activity in question (Glick 2015, 1). For instance, one may know many ways in which one could score a goal from a free kick at football (by kicking the ball in such-and-such way, with such-and-such force, etc.) and yet not know how to do it in practice.

In other words, the sufficiency problem is the claim that something else than propositional knowledge is needed for one to possess know-how, whether that something else is built on top of propositional knowledge (so we could say it is something more) or it is just different from knowledge-that, whatever we take that to be. Stanley and Williamson anticipate the sufficiency problem and claim that the knowledge present in know-how is propositional as well, only it is possessed under a practical mode of presentation (PMP). Later, Stanley (2011) replaced PMPs with *practical ways of thinking* which he analyses in a Fregean framework. The notion of a practical mode of presentation/practical way of thinking remains controversial, however. Various authors, such as Schiffer (2002), Noë (2005), and Glick (2015), claim that the introduction of PMPs is not sufficiently motivated or that PMPs are not sufficiently fleshed out from a theoretical standpoint. It does not help much that, both in Stanley and Williamson (2001) and Stanley (2011), the defense of PMPs/practical ways of thinking is made *via* a defense of the framework of modes of presentation (ways of thinking) in general. In both of these works, the authors' chief argument relies on other modes of presentation, namely indexical modes. Stanley (2011) devotes a large part of his theorizing to the elaboration of an Evansian analysis of *de se* knowledge by way of first-personal ways of thinking. About practical ways of thinking, Stanley claims that "[t]he existence of practical ways of thinking is a straightforward consequence

of the Fregean framework of individuating ways of thinking of things, one that has nothing directly to do with knowing how.” (Stanley 2011, 125) While one option is to reject modes of presentation/ways of thinking framework altogether, a more charitable but also more effective strategy is to argue just against PMPs/practical ways of thinking within that framework. This is what Glick (2015) attempts to do quite convincingly.

What should be clear, nevertheless, is that notwithstanding the dialectical overshadowing of their importance in the work of Stanley (& Williamson), PMPs are a key notion in the debate between intellectualists and anti-intellectualists. In the following section, I will attempt a reconstruction of the related notions of PMPs/practical ways of thinking/practical senses as they have been construed and employed in the literature together with an assessment of the main arguments against PMPs and their implications in related controversies regarding the intellectualism – anti-intellectualism debate.

What are PMPs? Or what could they be?

Imagine you are an amateur football player watching Lionel Messi play at the Camp Nou. At a certain point in the game, you witness Messi scoring a fabulous goal from a free kick. One of your friends, who is also there, leans towards you and whispers somewhat ironically: “You know, that is a way you could score a goal yourself when you take a free kick next time.” Of course, having seen Messi score a tremendous goal and scoring a similar goal yourself are two different things, even though your experience at the Camp Nou has provided you with knowledge of a certain way you could score a goal from a free kick. The friend’s teasing and Stanley & Williamson’s analysis of know-how are not that dissimilar *prima facie*. According to Stanley and Williamson (2001, 429), if x knows of a contextually relevant way w that w is a way for x to F , then x knows how to F . This is what gives rise to the sufficiency problem. Knowing a way to score (e.g., that you should kick the ball in such-and-such way) is not always the same with knowing how to score. The solution proposed by Stanley & Williamson to this problem is the introduction of practical modes of presentation. Pavese (2016, 650) aptly

summarizes the intellectualists' view on PMPs: "For one to come to know how to Φ , in the relevant sense, it is for one to know an answer to the question <How could one oneself Φ ?> under a practical mode of presentation."

The notion of PMP has been challenged most notably by Schiffer (2002), Noë (2005), Stalnaker (2012) and Glick (2015). Before discussing what I regard as the most important criticisms of the idea, I will examine the first attempt of using this notion due to Stanley and Williamson. In (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 429), the authors admit that giving an account of PMPs is "quite a substantial philosophical task", in the same way that explaining first-personal modes of presentation is. To be fair, Stanley & Williamson's entire case for PMPs is piggyback riding on the case for indexical modes of presentation and the similarity between indexical modes and PMPs. While they refrain from tackling the substantial task of providing an elucidation of PMPs, Stanley & Williamson set out to give a proof of the existence of such modes of presentation. Their starting point is the general thesis that the same proposition may be entertained under distinct modes of presentation, as it appears to be clear from the demonstrative vs. first-personal distinction present in:

- (1) John believes that that man has burning pants.
- (2) John believes that he himself has burning pants.

In a situation where John sees himself in the mirror, but mistakenly believes that the mirror is actually a window, the complement clauses of (1) and (2) have the same propositional content, yet (1) and (2) have different truth values – (1) is true and (2) is false. This speaks in favour of the existence of modes of presentation, which Stanley & Williamson treat as forms of entertaining a Russellian proposition, i. e. ways under which one has an attitude regarding a proposition. Now, what Stanley & Williamson claim is that the possibility of a similar divergence in truth-value of

- (3) Hannah knows that that way is a way for her to ride a bicycle.
- and
- (4) Hannah knows how to ride a bicycle.

can be accounted for in similar terms as the difference between (1) and (2). That is, both (3) and (4) ascribe propositional knowledge to Hannah, but the former does it under a demonstrative mode of presentation, while the latter does it under a PMP. That is what explains why (3) may be true without (4) being also true. The rest of Stanley & Williamson's existence proof navigates this analogy:

Thinking of a person as oneself entails being disposed to behave in certain ways, or form certain beliefs, given relevant input from that person. Similarly, thinking of a place as *here* entails being disposed to behave in certain ways, or form certain beliefs, given relevant input from that place. Analogously, thinking of a way under a practical mode of presentation undoubtedly entails the possession of certain complex dispositions. It is for this reason that there are intricate connections between knowing-how and dispositional states. (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 429)

One of the first sustained critiques of Stanley & Williamson's intellectualism appears in Noë (2005). A concern raised by Noë is that Stanley & Williamson's existence proof begs the question against the anti-intellectualist. Why posit that the difference between (3) and (4) should be accounted for in terms of modes of presentation of the same proposition?² That implies that the knowledge present in both (3) and (4) is propositional, but an anti-intellectualist would want to deny (4)'s propositional nature. Noë argues that, in order to evade this circularity charge, Stanley & Williamson should provide us with independent reasons for the existence of PMPs, much as there are independent reasons for acknowledging the existence of first-personal modes of presentation. According to Noë, Stanley & Williamson fail to do that (see Noë 2005, 287-288).

Glick (2015, 541) has rejected Noë's criticism of Stanley & Williamson insisting that they provide independent reasons by way of

² Glick (2015, 540) notices that the clauses in (3) and (4) express different contents. The former is a proposition, while the latter is the meaning of an embedded question. (4) is true if for some contextually relevant way *w* of riding a bicycle, Hannah knows that *w* is a way for her to ride a bicycle. Nevertheless, (3) provides us with just the kind of proposition that is needed for the quantified claim in (4) to be true. Consequently, the fact that (3) may be true, while (4) may be false still needs to be explained.

their linguistic argument for intellectualism, that is, by exploiting standard semantic theories according to which knowledge attributed by (4) has propositional content. Glick also uses the (subsequent to Noë's paper) elaboration of the intellectualist framework in Stanley (2011). In his book, Stanley replaces PMPs with practical ways of thinking which he analyses in Fregean terms as parts of propositions. I believe Noë's critique stands, even if it is not decisive against Stanley & Williamson. Regarding Glick's first point, what Noë objects to Stanley & Williamson's argument is not that they do not provide independent reasons for thinking that the knowledge attributed by (4) is propositional, but rather that Stanley & Williamson have not shown that the mode involved must be a practical one and also what it consists of. If Stanley & Williamson's other arguments are controversial (and they are), then they cannot just suppose that the knowledge present in (4) is propositional and, what is more, it is possessed under a practical mode of presentation. Now, about Glick's second point, it is worth pointing out that the weight of Stanley (2011)'s argument is again shifted to indexical, and mostly first-personal, modes of presentation. Stanley formulates a general defense of ways of thinking, rehearsing some key points about indexical modes, and – as I have mentioned before – practical ways of thinking are seen just as a straightforward consequence of adopting a Fregean ways-of-thinking analysis. While the framework is more complex (I will come back to it shortly), Noë's doubts are still noteworthy.

Glick puts forward his own critique of Stanley & Williamson's arguments. Even though he criticizes Noë, Glick's strategy is not that much different. The case is built around Stanley (2011)'s more elaborate attempt to defend practical ways of thinking. Glick focuses on Stanley's reference to a passage from Heidegger where, according to Stanley, the German philosopher "draws our attention" to practical ways of thinking by reflecting on the example of wielding a hammer. Stanley's interpretation of Heidegger's thoughts is problematic, so Glick sets upon trying to reconstruct a possible account of practical ways of thinking, in the sense of distinguishing between a hammer-wielder and an observer, *viz.*, between a supposedly practical and a non-practical way of thinking. Glick discards rapidly proprioception as a mark of the practical, because

not every know-how (e.g., solving puzzles, doing calculations) involves bodily movement and even in the case of the know-how that does so, experimental studies show there can be know-how without proprioception. Glick also rejects phenomenal concepts (concepts that one might come to have only in virtue of having a certain experience) as acceptable explanations, because the existence of such concepts is problematic, and because we should not rule out know-how for actions that do not have a phenomenology or the experience of performing them has been forgotten (e.g., one may not recollect how one rode a bicycle, yet be able to ride one when presented with the opportunity).

One of the most promising ideas explored by Glick concerns the *order* in which the various types of knowledge are formed. This argument can be framed at least initially in terms of learning-how vs. learning-that. Let us take a simple example. Some tennis coaches make their very young students play against a wall or a fence in order to shape and refine their shots and their reactions. Many actions, whether in sports or craftsmanship, are performed and repeated by the students initially and are “broken down” propositionally in explanations only later. It seems plausible that we need to learn how to perform a certain action sometimes before we can have access to any type of propositional knowledge, whether under a practical guise or in a classical conceptual countenance. In order to know that the tennis racquet is used “this way” we must first know how to use it. Therefore, even if PMPs of propositional content exist, nothing guarantees that they precede know-how in any way. Dickie (2012) proposed a similar argument to the effect that knowledge comes only after someone possesses the skill to perform a certain action. Dickie sums it up in the following way:

Consider the myriad routes to acquisition of skill. These routes include, but are not exhausted by, inborn talent; mindless repetition; unreflective imitation; hypnosis; induction from past attempts; reflection from first principles. The heterogeneity of this list generates an objection to intellectualism. For an account of propositional knowledge needs a justification component. And it is hard to see how the intellectualist can deliver the justification component of the skilled Φ -er’s knowledge that w is a way to Φ while respecting the variety in routes to acquisition of skill. (Dickie 2012, 741)

Now, this is a very interesting objection. What Dickie stresses is that the intellectualist needs justification for the acquisition of know-how, but this justification falls back on typical forms of justification for propositional knowledge (basically, evidential accounts) that fail to do justice to all the possible routes for acquiring know-how/skill. Yet, I think intellectualists may be able to work out at least a general version of an argument that the order of acquisition goes the desired way for them. Stanley (2011) holds that (practical) modes of presentation are connected to very complex dispositional states. Building on this, intellectualists might reply that, although we should agree that one needs to learn to shoot a bow reliably (i.e., succeed counterfactually) in order to acquire skill/know-how in shooting a bow, an agent already possesses some propositional knowledge under a PMP that allows her to learn how to shoot a bow. The archery student already knows (in a practical way) some true propositions about moving her hands, contracting her muscles, holding objects, coordinating her movements, etc., the more basic actions that compose the complex action of shooting a bow. The student does not operate in a vacuum of knowledge, but rather she uses her previous knowledge to acquire new knowledge and build up complex dispositional states on top of the previous ones so that she learns how to shoot an arrow more reliably. This rejoinder seems hard to tackle, perhaps because of its somewhat indefinite character, but the argument needs to be explored further. Anti-intellectualists might reject compositionality for complex actions and skill and maintain that there is something irreducible, Gestalt-like in at least some complex types of skill. That would ensure that some relevant (practical) propositional knowledge only comes after (even if immediately after) the development of a certain skill.

The controversy regarding the order of acquisition intersects another point of contention that is crucial for the intellectualist, that is, the question whether know-how presupposes ability or not. Although there is some ambivalence about this issue and accepting that ability is presupposed by know-how is not incompatible with their position, intellectualists typically reject the entailment. But what might be the intellectualists' reasons for rejecting this connection between know-how and ability? The critical role of this denial stems from an important

dialectical aim, that of rejecting Ryle's view. For Ryle (1949), know-how and skill appear to be one and the same – knowing how to ski means that one is skilled at skiing, which should entail that one is also able to ski. In contrast, the intellectualists should be at odds with this idea, first and foremost because it carves up the space of cognition in a very problematic way for them. The intellectualist needs to show that there is something peculiar to know-how on pain of succumbing to a Rylean collapse. Why should we suppose that there is something distinct called *know-how* when it suffices to distinguish between propositional knowledge and ability, and then posit that ability presupposes knowledge or manifests it or just is in itself knowledge? It should be clear that the concern about the order of development is related to this issue. If know-how does not presuppose ability, then some propositional knowledge under a PMP about a certain action must be present without performing that action, and therefore we have a strong reason to believe that PMPs are prior and more basic than the possession of skill.

Glick is also fully aware of the challenge posed to intellectualism by the relation between know-how and ability. If know-how is different from ability and can exist without it, the question is what know-how consists of. It is here that the need for an adequate account of PMPs presents itself, because PMPs supposedly contribute the extra element that differentiates know-how both from non-practical propositional knowledge and from ability *per se*. Glick attempts to shape up an account of PMPs based on Stanley and Williamson's analogy between indexical modes of presentation and PMPs. He examines the prospects of attributing three main features of indexical modes of presentation to PMPs as follows:

a. PMPs are associated with *conventional locutions*. While this might be true and useful in acknowledging the existence of PMPs, it does not tell us much about what PMPs are, *viz.*, about their role and characteristics (Glick 2015, 549).

b. PMPs involve distinctive ways of thinking of objects. Demonstrative modes of presentation are distinct from first-personal modes – John thinks of himself differently in the two cases presented by (1) and (2): in the former he thinks of himself “as that man in the mirror”, whereas in the latter he thinks of himself “as himself.” But this

does not translate well to the case of PMPs. Glick considers the case of Alice and Hannah - Alice knows how to ride a bicycle, while Hannah does not but each of them knows of a way w that that is a way for her to ride a bicycle. Both of them are physically fit and have seen someone riding a bicycle. Then, according to Glick, the difference between the two in an intellectualist framework should be that Hannah is not thinking in the right way about w , analogously to John from (1) who fails to identify himself as the man with burning pants (Glick 2015, 549-550). Glick deems this implausible, but I think that his criticism is incomplete and too one-sided. The trouble is not that it is implausible that Hannah thinks differently of riding a bicycle – it is quite intuitive that her thoughts are different from Alice’s – but rather that this does not illuminate us as to what PMPs are. So, we may accept that Hannah and Alice think differently about riding a bicycle, and we should notice here that putting the matter in terms of thinking in the right or in the wrong way seems to be partial: both of them may have correct (and also incorrect) beliefs about riding a bicycle. Moreover, success or lack of success in performing an action is not necessarily explained exclusively by adopting a certain way of thinking about that action, as Glick seems to maintain in this argument. Other factors, such as physical strength, muscle coordination, good sight, nervousness or just adopting some kind of behaviour may play an important role. However, the mysteriousness objection regarding PMPs persists: what do these differences consist in? What sets them apart? Why does one lead to practical success and the other does not? Isn’t success actually a prerequisite of having practical ways of thinking about a certain action?

c. PMPs involve distinctive dispositions. There is no account of the dispositional states that are connected to PMPs in Stanley (& Williamson)’s work. The problem with this feature is that without connecting the dispositions to F with the ability to F , it is hard to see what these dispositions might consist of. For instance, what is the difference in dispositions between someone who knows how to score a slam dunk and someone who does not know? Naturally, one would explain the difference by submitting that one has the disposition to score a slam dunk when one wants to and there are no obstacles to performing this action, while the other does not have the same disposition. But if

know-how is divorced from ability, then the disposition to F must be possessed, at least in some cases, by someone who does not have the ability to F . The question is: what is the difference in dispositional states between someone who does not know how to F and someone who knows how to F but is not able to F ? No clear answer seems to be available (Glick 2015, 552-553).

Practical senses

Pavese (2015) has recently attempted to provide a more detailed Fregean account of practical ways of thinking as practical senses modelled on operational semantic values for programming languages. For Pavese, know-how is knowledge of a practical proposition with a practical sense. I will not delve into the intricacies of Pavese's sophisticated theory here but let me notice that for Pavese practical senses are distinguished by two features: they require *rule-following capacities* and endow their graspers with *rule-following abilities* (Pavese 2015, 10). We can construe practical senses as inferential rules whose "inputs and outputs (...) are *ways of representing the commands to be executed and the result of the execution up to a certain point*" (Pavese 2015, 13). These representations need not be linguistic, they can also be map-like or picture-like, but even basic abilities (such as ear wiggling) have a cognitive aspect, according to Pavese (2015, 14). To argue for this, Pavese uses recent research in neurosciences which has shown that cognition is important in the acquisition of very basic motor skills, such as raising one's hand or holding a tool.

According to Pavese, this theory allows the intellectualist to respond to Glick's criticism that PMPs do not involve distinctive ways of thinking by maintaining that practical senses are operational semantic values (or akin to operational semantic values) That is, practical senses are inferential rules, i. e. "inferential ways of thinking of how to perform a task" (Pavese 2015, 19) that have cognitive significance. Now, this is problematic. While Pavese's proposal is indeed substantial, in comparison to Stanley's which is more programmatic and centered on an analogy, one can argue that Pavese's Fregean theory stretches the limits of a certain

local concept (or conception, at best) and is based as well on an analogy that is limited in scope. First, we should note that while it is plausible, albeit controversial, to equate know-how for complex tasks (such as playing tennis or painting) with knowing (and in many cases applying) some rules for that activity, this is problematic in cases of knowing how to perform simple actions, such as raising your hand or chewing. Moreover, it is not sufficient to mention studies that show that the acquisition of basic motor skills has a cognitive component; the intellectualist needs to show that the exertion of these skills in every context, e.g., even long after one has learned how to raise their hand and has performed this action numerous times, retains a cognitive dimension.³ Accepting Pavese's theory of practical senses means we should assent to a very broad understanding of what a rule means and what it means to follow some rule. Pavese has developed her view, in works such as (Pavese 2017) and (Pavese 2019), where she attempts to construct a theory of practical meanings as contents of motor commands, according to computational models of motor behaviour. However, it remains quite controversial that motor commands are rules (or rule-like), at least if we think of rules as always having propositional content. On the anti-intellectualist side, Fridland (2013, 2014, 2017a, 2017b) uses various empirical results to show that motor processes are intelligent in their entirety (without being necessarily propositional). Another contribution that uses this more flexible conception of embodied intelligence and knowledge is Levy (2017)'s version of the sufficiency objection, which is based on treating motor representations as intelligent, but non-propositional.

Another important aspect of Glick's criticism that Pavese answers only partially is that regarding the difference in ways of thinking between someone who has only non-practical propositional knowledge of *F*, someone who has know-how of *F* but does not have the ability to *F*, and someone who has the ability to *F* and, of course, also knows how to

³ The work of Hubert L. Dreyfus, in publications such as (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980) and (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986), contains a well-known view of expert performance according to which expertise is achieved by moving away from knowledge-guided decisions to some sort of perceptual acuity whereby the agent simply *sees* what needs to be done in each specific situation. Of course, such a perspective is incompatible with intellectualist theories.

F. Pavese capitalizes ingeniously on the idea of rule following, by distinguishing between knowing how to *F*, being able to intentionally *F* and being able to follow a rule to *F*. But these distinctions still cannot explain the difference in ways of thinking between someone who only knows how to *F* and someone who has the ability to *F* intentionally. In fact, Pavese holds that “knowledge how to Φ is sufficient for the ability to intentionally Φ ” (Pavese 2015, 17). As we have seen, this is not congenial for the intellectualist and may lead to all sorts of theoretical problems when attempting to defend an intellectualist position.

Concluding remarks

I will return briefly in the end to the problem of the propositional content of rules or know-how in general. Stalnaker (2012) formulates a very sympathetic critique of Stanley (2011)’s approach, underlining the fact that Stanley’s view may be seen as a reconsideration of an entire perspective on knowledge. If “propositional knowledge is the possession of information and the capacity to use that information to guide one’s actions” (Stalnaker 2012, 755), then paradigm cases of know-how are also cases of propositional knowledge. According to Stalnaker, Stanley’s view is much closer to Ryle’s than one would think, as Ryle had a similar interest in showing that knowledge is not just inert and theoretical, but he made the mistake of identifying intelligence with intellect and thus with theoretical operations, restricting his perspective too narrowly. Further on, Stalnaker launches a criticism of Stanley’s appeal to an Evansian analysis whereby practical ways of thinking are relations between ways to *F*, subjects and times. But if modes of presentation are constitutive of propositions, the adoption of Evans’ perspective leads to the consequence that propositions are thinker and time-dependent, which is contrary to Frege’s view, obscuring the distinction between the actual content of our beliefs and the way we deploy those beliefs in action (Stalnaker 2012, 760-761). Pavese (2015, 19) claims that her theory evades Stalnaker’s concerns by analyzing practical senses as operational semantic values, i.e. independent abstract objects that determine their referents. Now, the success of Pavese’s reply

is dependent on our willingness to adopt and extend this particular programming view of semantics, but what concerns us here is that although interesting and complex, the theoretical proposals of Stanley (&Williamson) and Pavese might lead to a rather problematic extension of our view of propositions. The basic question needs to be asked and repeated: when can something (namely knowledge) be qualified as propositional? Fridland (2015) argues against treating know-how as reasoning – because behaviours are always performed in specific circumstances where one cannot use only general rules – or as conceptual, because concepts are context-independent and conceptual thought is built on a type-token distinction, whereas context-independent elements cannot get tokened in skills. Consequently, if know-how is not conceptual, it cannot be propositional either, “because propositions are necessarily constituted by concepts.” (Fridland 2015, 720-721). If we accept Fridland’s view of propositions, then it is hard to see how one can defend an intellectualist perspective such as the ones that were examined in this paper. But any view of know-how relies on the definitions and analyses that we adopt for concepts such as *knowledge*, *proposition* and *intelligence*. Hopefully, as the intellectualism – anti-intellectualism debate is still lively and innovative, many such clarifications are forthcoming.

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