

## **Skilled action, propositional knowledge, and the nature of singular thought – a response to Stanley’s *Know How***

In his *Know How*, Jason Stanley defends ‘intellectualism’ about skilled action: the view that skilled action is guided by propositional knowledge. Abstracting from details, Stanley’s argument for intellectualism can be stated like this:

**1** The truth conditions for a sentence of form ‘S knows how to  $\Phi$ ’ are given by a clause of form

‘S knows how to  $\Phi$ ’ is true in context  $c$  iff S knows, in  $c$ , a proposition of form ‘ $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$ ’

**2** The truth conditions of ‘know-how’ ascriptions reveal the nature of know-how. [see esp. 144]

**3** An action is skilled iff it manifests the agent’s knowledge how to perform it. [p5]

**4** A skilled  $\Phi$ -ing manifests the agent’s knowledge, with respect to some way  $w$ , that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$ . [From 1, 2, 3]

**5** Skilled action is guided by propositional knowledge. [From 4]

I shall consider two objections to this argument.

The first is directed at the step from **4** to **5**. As far as I can see, *Know How* contains no argument for this step. Rather, Stanley seems to assume that once **4** is granted, **5** is inescapable. To resist the move from **4** to **5**, we need an account of how skilled  $\Phi$ -ing might *manifest* propositional knowledge without being *guided by* propositional knowledge. §1 sketches a route from an intuitive model of practical skill to such an account, and gives one reason to prefer the resulting view to Stanley’s intellectualism.

The second objection is a specific line of objection to **4**. According to this objection, what is manifested by an act of skilled  $\Phi$ -ing cannot be the agent’s knowledge of a proposition because it is not even a mental state with conceptual content: a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing manifests the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s non-conceptual capacity to pick a reliable way of  $\Phi$ -ing in a situation. §2 uses some elements of Stanley’s discussion and some elements of the proposal of §1 to suggest a response to this objection that I think promises an advance over extant accounts of the nature of singular thought.

### **1 A non-intellectualist account of the propositional knowledge of the skilled practitioner**

This section shows how to extend an intuitive, bare-bones account of practical skill into an account of skilled  $\Phi$ -ing as manifesting, but not guided by, propositional knowledge. It will not be possible in such a short discussion to develop all the details

of this proposal. So I shall say just enough to establish the following two results. Firstly, there is an alternative route to Stanley's 4 – a route to the claim that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge that is independent of Stanley's concern with know-how ascriptions. Secondly, we can agree with Stanley about 4 while rejecting 5. I suggest that each of these results strengthens the case for 4: the first because it is a good sign to find consistent but radically different arguments for the same conclusion; the second because 5 is objectionable in ways that 4 alone is not.

Let us start with an example to motivate the bare-bones account of practical skill. Suppose that Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham are shooting at a willow wand 250 yards away. Robin is an expert archer, easily able to hit a willow wand at 250 yards in normal conditions. The Sheriff is a poor archer, reliable only given a large, nearby target and no wind. Each intends to hit the target. Each draws his bow, takes the most careful aim of which he is capable, and releases his arrow. And each, as it turns out, scores a hit.

Now consider the following question. How should we characterise what Robin (the skilled practitioner) has and the Sheriff (the unskilled participant) lacks? Here is the bare-bones answer that I think suggests itself. (What follows is not a full answer. It is what I take to be the uncontroversial fragment that every full answer will share. I will then suggest that just this uncontroversial fragment can take us to the claim that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge.)

The difference in skill between Robin and the Sheriff is a difference with respect to the relationship between each agent's target-hitting intentions and the patterns of behaviour these intentions generate. When Robin intends to shoot something, his intention reliably generates a pattern of behaviour which, unless his situation is radically unlucky (a freak gust of wind; a seagull swooping into the arrow's path) will result in a successful shot. Robin's actual and likely intentions to shoot are non-lucky selectors of non-lucky means to their fulfilment. In contrast, when the Sheriff intends to shoot something, it will be a mere matter of luck if the movements generated by his intention result in success. Perhaps the Sheriff has a consistent but poor technique. In this case his intentions to shoot will reliably generate specific behaviour patterns given specific 'relative position of target' and 'prevailing wind' parameters, but these behaviour patterns will not reliably produce successful shots. Or perhaps he has no consistent technique, so there is no regular correlation between his attempted shots and the relevant parameters of shooting situations. Either way, the Sheriff's intentions are not (as Robin's are) non-lucky selectors of non-lucky means to their fulfilment.

Generalising and precisifying yield the following account of what it is to be a skilled  $\Phi$ -er:

S is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er iff, for an appropriate range  $\Sigma$  of situations  $\sigma$ , in the over-whelming majority of case, if S were to intend to  $\Phi$  in  $\sigma$ , S's intention would select as a means to its fulfilment some  $w \in f(\sigma)$ , where  $f$  is a function that takes each  $\sigma \in \Sigma$  to the set of reliable ways for S to  $\Phi$  in  $\sigma$ .

For example, S is a skilled archer iff there is an appropriate range of situations such that, across this range, if S intends to shoot a target in a situation, S's intention will select as a

means to its fulfilment some way of shooting that is a reliable way of hitting the target in the situation.

I shall suggest that this account of practical skill entails that skilled actions manifest propositional knowledge. But first let me consolidate the account by describing some of its more immediate consequences.

Firstly, the account allows that a skilled attempt to  $\Phi$  might fail: for each situation  $\sigma$ ,  $f(\sigma)$  is the set of *reliable* ways for S to  $\Phi$  in  $\sigma$ , and a reliable way of  $\Phi$ -ing in  $\sigma$  might fail to produce success on any specific occasion.

Secondly, the account allows that there are kinds of situation where a skilled  $\Phi$ -er is not reliable at  $\Phi$ -ing. These situations will be outside the appropriate range  $\Sigma$ . For example, the account allows that a skilled archer is not reliable in hurricane conditions. (The account also allows that a skilled  $\Phi$ -er might have an inflated sense of his/her powers, so might still form intentions to  $\Phi$  in situations this kind of situation.)

Thirdly, the account allows that a skilled  $\Phi$ -er might make a poor attempt to  $\Phi$  even within the range of situations across which a skilled  $\Phi$ -er's intentions to  $\Phi$  must be reliable generators of their fulfilment. (Robin Hood might make a sloppy shot.) We are requiring only that the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's intentions to  $\Phi$  be *reliable* selectors of reliable means to  $\Phi$ -ing over the  $\sigma$ . This allows that, in any specific  $\sigma$ , his or her intention to  $\Phi$  might generate a pattern of behaviour that is not a reliable means of  $\Phi$ -ing.

Finally, the account allows that, for some kinds of  $\Phi$ -ing, either the range of situations over which a skilled  $\Phi$ -er must be reliable, or the level of reliability required, or both might vary with context. So, for example, it allows that the skilled archer might not be *very* reliable at some particularly spectacular feat; just much more reliable than the rest of us. [Bach Ndpr note 13]

So we have on the table a base account (an account providing a basic necessary condition) of what it takes to be a skilled practitioner. And we have seen that this base account generates some desirable consequences. Now I am going to show that it also (nearly) generates the consequence that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge.

As a first move towards this conclusion, let us convert the base characterisation of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er into a base characterisation of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing. I take it that a 'skilled' action is an action arising in an appropriate way from the skill of a skilled practitioner. Combining this with the suggested account of what it takes to be a skilled practitioner we get

S's  $\Phi$ -ing in context  $c$  is a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing only if

- (i) most of the time, if S intends to  $\Phi$  in some  $\sigma \in \Sigma$ , S's intention will select some  $w \in f(\sigma)$  as a means to its fulfilment (that is, S is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er);
- (ii) S intends to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ ;
- (iii) the way,  $w$ , in which S  $\Phi$ 's in  $c$  is (appropriately) generated by the selection function mentioned at (i) (that is, S's  $\Phi$ -ing in  $c$  is a  $\Phi$ -ing-in-way- $w$ , and S's intention to  $\Phi$  leads to selection of  $w$  as a means to its fulfilment because  $w \in f(c)$ ).

For example, Robin's shooting of a target is a skilled shooting only if Robin is a skilled archer; he intends to shoot the target; and the pattern of behaviour that results in his

success is appropriately generated by his intention and his skill – the pattern of behaviour is selected by Robin’s intention because it will result in reliable target-hitting in the situation.

Now let us focus on (iii) in this formulation – the requirement that S’s intention to  $\Phi$  generate pattern of behaviour  $w$  because  $w \in f(c)$ . (iii) requires that S’s acting in way  $w$  be a response to the fact that  $w \in f(c)$ . But S can *respond* only to facts that S registers. So (iii) requires that S *register* the fact that  $w \in f(c)$ . But to register the fact that  $w \in f(c)$  just is to register the fact that  $w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ . And it is a small step from here to the claim that S has a mental state that *represents*  $w$  as a way to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ .

The claim that the agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in-way- $w$  has a mental state that represents  $w$  as a way to  $\Phi$  in  $c$  falls short of the claim that the agent *grasps the proposition* that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ . For a mental state can have representational content without having propositional content. But let us grant the step for the moment and see what happens. (Both Stanley and the proponent of the view that I am developing here need to defend the claim that the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s sensitivity to reliable ways of  $\Phi$ -ing in a situation should be treated as grasp of a proposition. I shall defend this claim in §2.)

The move from ‘representational content’ to ‘propositional content’ brings us to the following elaboration of (iii):

(iii\*) S’s  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  in  $c$  is a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing only if a right explanation for the fact that S  $\Phi$ ’s-in- $w$  in  $c$  appeals to S’s grasp of a proposition of form  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  (in  $c$ ) $\rangle$ .

Given (iii\*), we have the claim that a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing manifests the agent’s grasp of a Stanley-esque  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi \rangle$  proposition. But is this proposition known by the agent?

Here is a reason to think that it is.

Note first that the proposition is true: a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  in  $c$  is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s response to the fact that the  $w \in f(c)$ , where  $f(c)$  is the set of reliable ways to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ ; since  $w \in$  the set of reliable ways to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ , the proposition  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  in  $c \rangle$  is true.

Note also that it is plausible that the agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing is committed to the truth of the relevant  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  (in  $c$ ) $\rangle$  proposition. For, on the face of things, the agent’s relation to this proposition has the world-to-mind orientation characteristic of ‘commitment’ propositional attitudes (like knowledge and belief) rather than the mind-to-world orientation characteristic of attitudes like desire and hope. For example, like a belief, and unlike a desire, the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s relation to the  $\langle w$  is a way to  $\Phi \rangle$  proposition tracks relevant features of the world (in a context that differed with respect to relevant ways to  $\Phi$ , the skilled  $\Phi$ -er would not stand in the relation to the same proposition). And like belief, but unlike desire, the agent’s relation to the proposition is subject to undermining by contrary evidence.

Finally, note that it is not just a matter of luck that the agent’s commitment is commitment to the truth of a proposition that is in fact true. Rather, given how the

commitment is formed, the agent will be unlucky if it is a commitment to a false proposition, and is not merely lucky that it is a commitment to a true one. The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  is committed to the truth of  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi \rangle$  because she intends to  $\Phi$  and her intention selects  $w$  as a reliable means to its fulfilment. Since she is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er, it is reliably the case that the means to  $\Phi$ -ing selected by her intentions in fact *are* reliable means to  $\Phi$ -ing: she will be unlucky if her intention does not select a reliable means to  $\Phi$ -ing and not merely lucky if it does. So the story about how a skilled  $\Phi$ -er ends up committed to a  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi \rangle$  proposition entails that the proposition she is committed to is very likely to be true.

Putting these observations together, we have the following:

If S's  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  in  $c$  is a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing, then

- (i) S is committed to the truth of the proposition  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  (in  $c$ )>;
- (ii) This proposition is true;
- (iii) S is not just lucky that the proposition is true.

And having come this far, it seems like mere narrow-mindedness to deny S's commitment to the truth of the proposition the status of knowledge. So we have reached our destination: a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing manifests the agent's knowledge of a  $\langle w$  is a way to  $\Phi \rangle$  proposition.

(Note that this path to the claim that skilled  $\Phi$ -ing manifests knowledge that  $w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi$  suggests an account of what distinguishes 'ways' from one another:  $w = w^*$  iff  $w$  and  $w^*$  are reliable across the same range of situations.)

The central contrast between this proposal and Stanley's intellectualism is a contrast in priority of explanation between practical skill and the propositional knowledge manifested by skilled action.

According to Stanley's intellectualist view, the possession of practical skill is explained in terms of the propositional knowledge manifested by skilled action:

*The intellectualist order of explanation: knowledge before skill* – S's  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  in  $c$  counts as a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing insofar as it is guided by S's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  in  $c$  (so in a case of skilled  $\Phi$ -ing, S chooses  $w$  as a way to  $\Phi$  because S knows that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$ ); S is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er iff S knows a range of propositions of the kind that can guide skilled action.

The view developed in this section reverses Stanley's order of explanation:

*The anti-intellectualist order of explanation: skill before knowledge* – S is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er iff S's intentions to  $\Phi$  are non-lucky selectors of non-lucky means to their fulfilment; a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing counts as manifesting propositional knowledge because it is the appropriately generated  $\Phi$ -ing of a skilled  $\Phi$ -er.

At the start of the section I contended that Stanley's intellectualism (5) is objectionable in ways the claim that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge (4) is not. With the anti-intellectualist view in place, this contention can be reformulated:

some of the most powerful objections to the intellectualist's version of the claim that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge do not arise for the anti-intellectualist's, so an anti-intellectualist can agree with Stanley that skilled action manifests propositional knowledge while avoiding many problematic aspects of his overall view. The last part of the section develops a specific instance of this general line of thought.

Consider the myriad ways that (on the face of things) a skill might be acquired:

- (a) inborn talent
  - (b) mindless repetition
  - (c) unreflective imitation
  - (d) hypnotism
  - (e) induction from one's own past attempts
  - (f) induction from observation of other people's attempts
  - (g) reflection from first principles.
- (Not an exhaustive list....)

This is an heterogeneous list. And its heterogeneity generates an objection to intellectualism. For an account of propositional knowledge needs a justification component. And it is hard to see where the intellectualist's account of the justification of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  can come from.

Here is why. According to intellectualism, what makes the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  distinctively practical is how it is manifested: the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  is essentially manifested in successful  $\Phi$ -ings. So, on this view, the special status of knowledge-how (its status as a distinctive kind of knowledge-that) is located on the 'output' side (in how the possessor of know-how is disposed to behave). Intellectualism has no resources for a distinctively practical story about how the skilled  $\Phi$ -er comes by his or her knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$ : the intellectualist is explaining what it is to have a skill and what it is for an action to be skilled in terms of propositional knowledge, not the other way around. So an intellectualist looking for the justification component of his or her account of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's propositional knowledge is thrown back on the standard array of accounts of where our propositional knowledge gets its justification.

For example, consider Stanley's account of a skilled baseball player's knowledge how to catch a fly ball:

In order to know how to catch a fly ball, one must amass enough of the right *kind* of evidence to know, of a certain way of moving that one thinks of practically, that it is a way that will yield counterfactual success in fly-ball catching. Once this realization has been made, practice leads to direct action, action without the necessity for reflection. [130]

Stanley is careful to stress that (on his view) a skilled practitioner's knowledge-how is based on a *special kind* of evidence; that it involves a special way of thinking of ways of acting; and that once knowledge-how is attained, it can count as 'guiding' action unreflectively. But these claims about the distinctiveness of knowledge-how do nothing to secure a distinctive kind of knowledge-how-ish justification: according to Stanley, the justification that secures the skilled practitioner's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  is just a specific case of justification on the basis of evidence.

Now look again at (a)-(g). The apparent heterogeneity of routes to skill presents the intellectualist with a problem which must be overcome either by denying that some of a-g are routes to skill, or arguing that all of them result in  $\langle w \text{ is a reliable way to } \Phi \rangle$  beliefs for which we can tell something like the justificatory story Stanley tells for the skilled fielder. Though I cannot argue for this claim here, I suggest that neither of these moves promises the intellectualist a happy outcome.

And now consider the anti-intellectualist alternative. On the anti-intellectualist view, the agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing knows that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  because (i) s/he is cognitively committed to the truth of the proposition  $\langle w \text{ is a way to } \Phi \rangle$ ; (ii) this proposition is true; and (iii) given that the agent is a skilled  $\Phi$ -er, it is not just a matter of luck that s/he is cognitively committed to a true proposition. But the 'luck-eliminating' relation at (iii) is not secured by any evidence the agent might have for the proposition's truth. Rather, it is secured by the agent's skill. On this account the skilled practitioner's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  is knowledge generated by intention and skill, not knowledge based on evidence.

I suggest that this difference with respect to justification for knowledge-how presents powerful grounds for anti-intellectualism. On an intellectualist view, the justificatory component of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's knowledge that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  has to come from the way the skill is acquired. On an anti-intellectualist view, in contrast, the justificatory component of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's knowledge-that does not come from how the skill is acquired. It comes from the role the skill plays in generating non-lucky fulfilment of intentions to  $\Phi$ . So, on this view, *how* you know how to  $\Phi$  does not matter from the point of view of *whether* you know how to  $\Phi$ : knowledge-how is an artifact of skill, and is the preserve of the skilled  $\Phi$ -er, regardless of how the skilled  $\Phi$ -er comes by his or her proficiency.

## 2 Knowledge-how, knowledge-that, and the nature of singular thought

The second objection to Stanley that I shall consider is also an objection to the anti-intellectualist view outlined in §1. Someone raising this objection grants that a skilled  $\Phi$ -er, intending to  $\Phi$  in  $c$ , is sensitive to what will and will not reliably result in  $\Phi$ -ing in  $c$ . But, the objector contends, this sensitivity cannot count as a kind of propositional knowledge: a mental state can count as propositional knowledge iff it is a conceptual mental state, and the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's sensitivity to reliable ways of  $\Phi$ -ing meets none of the criteria that distinguish states of this kind.

Stanley has an immediate response to this challenge: the claim that the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's sensitivity to reliable ways of  $\Phi$ -ing is a species of propositional knowledge is warranted by the connection between skill and know-how, and the linguistic evidence about knowledge-how ascriptions. As far as I can see, the anti-intellectualist proposal I have suggested is structurally close enough to Stanley's view that, insofar as this response works for Stanley, it works for the anti-intellectualist too.

But (as Stanley recognises) this immediate response cannot be definitive. For the response raises an immediate challenge: it is not enough just to insist that the linguistic evidence warrants treating the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's sensitivity to the fact that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$  as

propositional knowledge. We must also explain how it *can* count as propositional knowledge in the face of the objector's accusations that it lacks the characteristic marks of the conceptual.

I shall sketch one line of response to this challenge, and close with a question about whether this line of response is open to Stanley.

Let me start by making the accusation that the skilled  $\Phi$ -er's sensitivity lacks the characteristic marks of the conceptual more precise. One traditional characterisation of conceptual representation of particulars is in terms of grasp of criteria of identity. According to this characterisation, to count thinking about an object you must know what it would be to be presented with the same object again: you might be in a mental state that represents the object without having this capacity, but such a mental state will not be a state of thinking about the object; it will be a state whose representational content is non-conceptual.

Given this traditional view about conceptual representation, the 'this is not propositional content' objection can be developed into the following argument.

1 The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  may be unable to articulate or reflect on what distinguishes  $w$  from other ways of  $\Phi$ -ing; unable to recognise  $w$  as the same way of  $\Phi$ -ing employed again; and unable to grasp what it would be for someone else to  $\Phi$  in the same way.

But

2 A subject who lacks all of these capacities cannot be credited with grasp of  $w$ 's criterion of identity.

So

3 The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  need have no grasp of  $w$ 's criterion of identity.

So

4 The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  need not grasp a conceptual representation of  $w$ .

But

5 In general, grasp of a proposition about a particular involves grasp of a conceptual representation of the particular.

So

6 The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in- $w$  need not grasp any  $\langle w$  is a reliable way to  $\Phi \rangle$  proposition.

The response to this argument that I want to suggest involves rejection of 5.



To see how there is room for this response, let us step back for a moment to consider the extant philosophical debate about the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual representation. The extant debate treats this distinction either as a distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual mental states, or as a distinction between the conceptual and non-conceptual representational content of mental states. The standard suggestion is then that the propositional attitudes are either conceptual mental states, or mental states with conceptual representational content (depending on whether you took the ‘state’ or ‘content’ route with respect to the conceptual/non-conceptual divide).

But these standard approaches to the conceptual/non-conceptual distinction ignore a third possibility. Rather than, or as well as, asking whether a mental state is conceptual, or has a conceptual content, we can ask whether a representing relation between a subject and an represented entity is conceptual. For example, suppose we treat the traditional claim that thinking about *o* involves grasp of *o*’s criterion of identity as a claim about representing relations rather than about mental states or their contents. Then we can distinguish ‘conceptual’ from ‘non-conceptual’ representing relations as follows:

Definition – Relation R between S and *o* is a ‘conceptual representing relation’ iff (a) S represents *o* in virtue of standing in R to *o*, and (b) standing in R to *o* involves grasp of *o*’s criterion of identity.

Definition – Relation R between S and *o* is a ‘non-conceptual representing relation’ iff (a) S represents *o* in virtue of standing in R to *o*, and (b) standing in R to *o* involves sensitivity to the difference between *o* and all  $o^* \neq o$ , but does not involve grasp of *o*’s criterion of identity.

Now let us combine this distinction with what I take to be the best contemporary Fregean account of the constituents of propositions.

Frege thought that a proposition is a structured whole constructed from modes of presentation (for example, the proposition expressed by ‘Jack is asleep’ is a structured whole whose constituents are a mode of presentation of Jack and a mode of presentation of the function which takes an object to the truth value TRUE iff it is asleep.) Anyone taking this kind of view must explain the ontological status of modes of presentation. I take the best contemporary explanation to be that a mode of presentation is a reification of a representing relation. If you believe that Jack is asleep, you stand in a representing relation to Jack and a representing relation to the function which delivers value TRUE for all and only sleepers as arguments. The Fregean claim that your belief is an attitude to a proposition constructed from modes of presentation is short-hand for the claim that holding the belief involves joint exercise of the representational capacities secured by these representing relations.

This account of the constituents of a proposition combines with the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual representing relations to deliver a way to resist 5 (the claim that grasp of a proposition about *o* involves conceptual representation of *o*). For if a propositional constituent is just a reified representing relation, and there can be non-conceptual representing relations, then – unless there is a good argument against them – we should allow that there can be non-conceptual propositional constituents.

Though there is not room to argue for this proposal here, I suggest that this line of thought raises the possibility of an improvement on extant accounts of the nature of singular propositions. According to the standard definition, a ‘singular’ proposition is a proposition that contains an object as a constituent. But the central terms in this definition (‘contain’; ‘constituent’) require further explanation. The line of thought of this section lets us replace the standard definition with something more informative:

Definition: A ‘singular’ proposition about  $o$  is a proposition grasp of which involves standing in a non-conceptual representing relation to  $o$ : a representing relation that involves sensitivity to  $o$  rather than any  $o^* \neq o$ , but does not require grasp of  $o$ ’s criterion of identity.

For example, consider the case of perceptual demonstrative thoughts (thoughts made available by perceptual contact with objects). I suggest that a right account of perceptual demonstrative thoughts will treat them as ‘singular’ in the sense just defined. Grasp of a perceptual demonstrative thought about  $o$  involves sensitivity to  $o$  rather than  $o^*$  just because the perceptual link that makes the thought available is a link with  $o$  not  $o^*$ . But grasp of the thought does not require grasp of  $o$ ’s criterion of identity. Our grasp of criteria of identity for the things our singular thoughts are about is extracted from our grasp of the singular thoughts, not a precondition for it.

We are now in a position to see the response that I suggest to the ‘this is not propositional content’ objection. The agent of a skilled  $\Phi$ -ing-in-way- $w$  stands in a non-conceptual representing relation to  $w$ : s/he is sensitive to the difference between  $w$  and  $w^*$ , but s/he need have no grasp of  $w$ ’s criterion of identity.

This proposal raises more questions than I can even state, let alone address, in this venue. But, because I suspect that Stanley will be sympathetic to *something like* this response to the ‘not propositional content’ objection, I shall leave all other questions aside and close with a question connecting the issues about singular thought raised in this section with the intellectualist/anti-intellectualist contrast developed in §1: Can Stanley have something like the response to the ‘this is not propositional content’ objection that I have proposed?

Here is one reason to think he cannot. We have seen that on Stanley’s view the justificatory story for the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s knowledge-that is a (special case of) a standard evidence-based story: the skilled  $\Phi$ -er is justified in taking  $w$  to be a way to  $\Phi$  because s/he has enough of the right kind of evidence that  $w$  is a way to  $\Phi$ . But it is at least initially plausible that an evidence-based justificatory story can apply only where the proposition supported is fully conceptual. For every evidence-based justificatory story requires that the subject recognise the relevance of the evidence accrued to what some particular object is like. And it is hard to see how this recognition will be possible unless the subject grasps the object’s criterion of identity.

So I suggest that there is at least an initial challenge as to whether Stanley can combine a plausible account of how the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s sensitivity to reliable ways of  $\Phi$ -ing can count as propositional with his intellectualist view of how the skilled  $\Phi$ -er’s knowledge-that is justified.