

Self-knowledge, belief, ability (and agency?)

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Matthew Boyle (2011) has defended an account of doxastic self-knowledge he calls 'Reflectivism'. I distinguish two claims within Reflectivism, A) that believing that *p* and knowing oneself to believe that *p* are not two distinct cognitive states, but two aspects of the same cognitive state, and B) that this is because we are in some sense agents in relation to our beliefs. I find claim (A) compelling, but argue that its tenability depends on how we view the metaphysics of knowledge, something Boyle does not consider. I argue that in the context of the standard account of knowledge as a kind of true belief – what I call the Belief Account of knowledge – the claim faces serious problems, and that these simply disappear if we instead adopt an Ability Account of knowledge along the lines of that defended by John Hyman (1999, 2015). I find claim (B) less compelling, and a secondary aim of the paper is to suggest that once we reject the Belief Account of knowledge, and move over to an Ability Account, there is no explanatory role for (B) left to play.

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1. Introduction*

When people ask me what I believe on some matter, I can usually answer them. Assuming I am sincere, lucid and not self-deceived, what I tell them about my belief will be true, and it is standard to think that this capacity to truly answer a question about what I believe typically manifests *knowledge* of my own belief, or 'doxastic self-knowledge'.

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Doxastic self-knowledge is typically ‘transparent’, in the sense that it rests not on a capacity to consider *whether one has* the belief in question, but on a capacity to consider this belief’s *content*. To borrow Gareth Evans’ famous example (Evans 1982, 225), I know that I believe that there will be a third world war (assuming I do so believe) not because I have considered reasons or evidence which (I take to) support the proposition *that I believe that* there will be a third world war, but because I have considered – if anything – reasons which (I take to) support the proposition *that there will be one*.

Matthew Boyle (2011) provides an account of doxastic self-knowledge aimed at explaining its transparency, a view he calls ‘Reflectivism’ (the aptness of this label will become clear in §2). Reflectivism has two elements. The first is that a person’s *belief that p* and her *knowledge that she believes that p* are not two distinct cognitive states, but two aspects of a single cognitive state, so that one’s *being in* some belief-state is already tacitly knowing oneself to be in it. I will call this the ‘two-in-one’ claim. If the two-in-one claim is true, then it needs explaining, since not all conditions of a person are such that being in them brings with it tacit knowledge that one is in them.

The second element of Reflectivism seeks to provide this explanation by attending to the metaphysics of belief: Boyle suggests that beliefs are tacitly known because they manifest a person’s rational agency. I will call this the ‘doxastic agency’ claim.

In §2, after describing Reflectivism in more detail, I explain why I find the two-in-one claim compelling, and the doxastic agency claim less so. My main aim in this paper concerns the two-in-one claim, and this is my focus in §3 and §4. I will argue that its tenability depends on how we view the metaphysics of knowledge, something Boyle does not consider: in the context of the standard account of knowledge as a kind of true belief – what I call the *Belief Account* of knowledge – the two-in-one claim faces serious problems (§3), but these problems simply disappear if we adopt an alternative *Ability Account* of knowledge which has been defended by John Hyman (§4).

My main conclusion is that anyone attracted to the two-in-one claim must reject the Belief Account of knowledge, and that an Ability Account provides a good alternative. But I also suggest that once we have located the (to my mind compelling) two-in-one claim within an Ability Account

of knowledge, there is no explanatory role left for the (to my mind less compelling) doxastic agency claim to play in an account of doxastic self-knowledge.

2. Reflectivism

Boyle motivates Reflectivism through a criticism of a rather different way of thinking about transparent doxastic self-knowledge, an *Inferentialist* account which has been defended by Alex Byrne. I describe this account and Boyle's objections to it in §2.1. In §2.2 we see how these criticisms motivate the first claim of Reflectivism, the two-in-one claim, and I explain why I find the claim compelling. In §2.3 I turn to the doxastic agency claim, which is offered by Boyle as an explanation of why the two-in-one claim should be true, and I explain why I am sceptical of this explanation.

2.1. Byrne's Inferentialism

Byrne defends an inferentialist account, on which doxastic self-knowledge is derived from a 'world-to-mind' inference in accordance with:

The Doxastic Schema:

p

—————

I believe that p

The account is aimed at explaining two things: first, why our beliefs about our beliefs count as knowledge, and second, why this knowledge is transparent.

The conclusion's status as knowledge is dependent on its being come by *via* a good method of belief-formation. The Doxastic Schema is neither deductively valid (because the truth of some worldly proposition, p does not entail that one believes it), nor inductively strong (because there are an indefinite number of true worldly propositions which a given person will fail to believe). For Byrne, reasoning in accordance with the Doxastic Schema is nevertheless a good method of belief-formation, because it guarantees conclusion-beliefs which are both true and safe (which could not easily have been false). This is because inferring from a premise, p requires *believing*

that p, and because *that one believes that p* is precisely what someone reasoning in accordance with the Doxastic Schema concludes.

Whilst truth and safety are not suggested as being sufficient for knowledge, Byrne claims that they are both (undoubtedly in the case of truth, and plausibly in the case of safety) central necessary conditions on knowledge. He takes this observation to remove any doubt we might have about how second-order beliefs formed by reasoning in accordance with the doxastic schema could count as knowledge, given that this reasoning is neither deductively valid nor inductively strong.¹

And knowledge derived in this way would also be transparent. Consider again my knowledge that I believe there will be a third world war. On Byrne's view, I infer this directly (i.e. without any extra premises) from the premise *that* (as it seems to me) *there will be a third world war*. So all I need epistemically speaking in order to come by this knowledge is my first-order belief that there will be a third world war, where this belief will be based on my assessment of whatever considerations I take to bear on *whether there will be a third world war*, and not on any assessment of considerations I take to bear on *whether I believe that there will be a third world war*. And this is just what we are calling the transparency of doxastic self-knowledge.

But Boyle argues that Inferentialism faces a dilemma: either the transition it posits leaves one with a second-order judgment which is 'unsustainable', and so not truly a *belief*, or it leads to a sustainable belief, but cannot take the form of an inference.

Why should the conclusion-judgment be unsustainable? Start by granting that a person might 'infer' from 'p' to 'I believe that p' in the sense of being – to put it deliberately vaguely – somehow prompted by the first to judge the second. Still, thinks Boyle, there is more to believing a proposition than making a judgment, on an occasion, with that proposition as its content. So there is more to believing on the basis of inference than being prompted by a certain content (such as *that there will be a third world war*) to make a judgment, on an occasion, with another (such as *that I believe that there will be a third world war*).

Unlike judging, believing is a sustained condition of *holding a proposition true*, of 'finding persuasive a certain view about what is the case' (Boyle 2011, 231). True, we are not always consciously considering and endorsing the propositions we believe. But one *can* reflect on one's

grounds for any belief that one holds, and the sustainability of any belief depends on one's then continuing to find it persuasive on those very grounds.

The trouble is that judgments derived *via* the doxastic schema don't seem likely to meet this condition. For the mere fact that (as it seems to me) there *will be* a third world war would only render it persuasive for me *that I believe that* there will be a third world war if I were suffering delusions of omniscience. Assuming I am not delusional, reasoning in accordance with the Doxastic Schema can at best prompt me to *judge* that I believe that there will be a third world war. It can't underwrite a *belief* that that I believe that there will be a third world war, where this is understood as a continuing endorsement of the proposition *that I believe that there will be a third world war*.

There is a way of avoiding this problem, but it leads the Inferentialist on to the second horn of Boyle's dilemma. The thought here is that the conclusion-judgment – *that I believe that there will be a third world war* – would relate to a sustainable belief if it were not thought of as precipitating a new (second-order) belief, but as expressing or manifesting an existing recognition, on my part, that I accept the premise.

But to take this view would be to admit that my judgment that I believe that there will be a third world war rests on tacit knowledge (or at least belief) that I believe that there will be a third world war, and admitting this is akin to giving up on Inferentialism. For the Inferentialist sees me as *coming to know* (believe) that I believe that there will be a third world war, by reasoning in accordance with the Doxastic Schema; yet on the view just sketched, I know that I believe that there will be a third world war all along, and in so believing. The transition I make does not furnish me with new doxastic self-knowledge, it simply brings my existing doxastic self-knowledge to my attention.

So the Inferentialist can't accept the latest proposal, but Boyle thinks it is precisely the right thing to say, and he embraces it as a core commitment of his preferred Reflectivist account. Let's consider Reflectivism in a bit more detail, starting in §2.2 with its first element – the two-in-one claim – and moving on to the second – the doxastic agency claim – in §2.3.

2.2. The first element of Reflectivism: the two-in-one claim

According to Reflectivism, a belief is the kind of state such that (at least ‘in the normal, non-alienated case’ [Boyle 2011, 235]) being in it is sufficient for knowing that one is in it, because one’s belief that *p* and one’s knowledge that one believes that *p* are ‘not two cognitive states [but] are two aspects of *one* cognitive state’ (Boyle 2011, 228). This latter is what I am calling the two-in-one claim.

Reflectivism thus holds that judging that I believe that there will be a third world war is not a matter of coming by a new bit of knowledge, but is an explicit manifestation or expression of the knowledge I already tacitly have in believing that there will be a third world war. And the ‘transition’ from believing that there will be a third world war to judging that this is what I believe, is not an inference from one belief to a second (as Byrne wanted to hold), but is instead a re-focusing of my attention, ‘from the world with which [I am] engaged to [my] engagement with it’ (Boyle 2011, 228). It is because taking this kind of ‘step’ is simply a matter of reflecting on what I already tacitly know, that Boyle terms the account ‘Reflectivism’.

The two-in-one claim is radical.² It is standard to assume that rather generally, whilst a person’s knowing that *p* entails that *p* is true (because knowledge is factive), the other direction of entailment does not hold. It is assumed, as we might put it, that knowledge *per se* is accidental to its object. I might know that the Kodiak bear exists, or that today is a Sunday, or that Emily believes that there will be a third world war, but the truth of these propositions is completely independent of my knowing them. It doesn’t depend on my knowing them, and nor is it sufficient for my knowing them. The two-in-one claim, if true, would conflict with claiming that this feature of knowledge in cases like those just described is a feature of knowledge *tout court*. Doxastic self-knowledge (and other kinds of self-knowledge for which the two-in-one claim might also be imagined to hold³) would be a counterexample to the claim.

I don’t raise this as an objection to the two-in-one claim, only to point out that accepting it has implications which reach beyond the understanding of doxastic self-knowledge, and into the realm of general epistemology. Yet despite these far-reaching implications, I think the claim is compelling. Let’s turn to considering why.

We have already seen how the two-in-one claim enables us to avoid the problems facing Inferentialism. We can now add that it enables us to explain doxastic self-knowledge's transparency in a way similar to the explanation open to the Inferentialist. Given the two-in-one claim, it is sufficient for me to know that I believe that there will be a third world war, that I believe that there will be a third world war. This means that at most, the only evidence I need to consult in order to know that I believe that there will be a third world war is evidence relevant to *whether there will be one*: it is by assessing this evidence that I either form, or confirm, my belief *that there will be a third world war*, and the two-in-one claim entails that my knowledge that this is what I believe comes for free along with this belief.

We might even think that accepting the two-in-one claim gives us a better explanation of transparency than that available to the Inferentialist. For whilst, according to Inferentialism, the only materials I need epistemically speaking in order to come to know that I believe that there will be a third world war are a belief that there will be one, and whatever reasons or evidence required for this, according to Reflectivism, these are also the only materials I need metaphysically speaking. I know that I believe that there will be a third world war *in so believing*, according to the two-in-one claim. So the Reflectivist construes the relationship between a consideration of the truth of *p* and the possession of knowledge that I believe that *p* as even tighter than does the Inferentialist.

2.3.The second element of Reflectivism: the doxastic agency claim

So I think that the two-in-one claim gives us a good explanation of transparency whilst avoiding the problems inherent in Inferentialism. But in addition to recognising the theoretical benefits its truth would bring us if we are to accept it, we also need to show that it *is* plausibly true. This is especially pressing given the radical implications of the claim, described above.

What we need is an explanation of why believing a proposition should at the same time be knowing oneself to believe it. Boyle describes Reflectivism as a 'metaphysical' account of doxastic self-knowledge, in that it appeals to an account of the metaphysics of belief in providing this explanation. This is where the second element of Reflectivism comes in.

The doxastic agency claim is not simply the claim that we are in some sense agents in relation to our beliefs. It is the claim that the two-in-one claim is true *because* we are in some sense agents in relation to our beliefs. The claim that we are agents in relation to our beliefs is itself controversial, but I will simply assume it for the sake of argument in what follows.⁴

Boyle thinks that understanding beliefs as exercises of our agency can explain the truth of the two-in-one claim. He is indebted here to Richard Moran (2001). On the Moran-style view, I know that I believe that there will be a third world war not because I am in a particularly good position to *find out* about my beliefs, but because whether I believe it is something I am in a position to *decide*. I do this when I make up my mind about the truth of the proposition that there will be a third world war.

The thought is that I can know that I believe that there will be a third world war by deciding that the proposition that there will be one is true, in something like the way in which I can know that I will (e.g.) have a coffee in a minute by deciding to do so. In both cases, I come to know a proposition (that I believe that there will be a third world war; that I will have a coffee) not by discovering, but by determining, its truth. In both cases, the thought goes, the resulting knowledge does not rest on my possession or recognition of evidence for the truth of their contents, but is embodied in an exercise of my agency.

In emphasising the role of ‘making up my mind’, Moran can give the impression that doxastic agency is manifested in a certain kind of process or procedure – one of assessing evidence and drawing conclusions. And of course a person’s doxastic agency can be manifested in this way. But Boyle thinks that Moran’s real insight is ‘that it shows how normal doxastic self-knowledge reflects something about what believing *is*’ (Boyle 2011, 235; his emphasis).

For Boyle, believing itself is an exercise of rational agency:

... *all* our normal, non-alienated beliefs are, in a perfectly good sense, acts of our capacity to make up our minds. They are all enduring actualizations of our power to evaluate propositions as true, in the light of such grounds as we deem relevant. This evaluation is not an act one performs to *produce* a belief in oneself; it is one’s belief itself. (Boyle 2011, 236)

Whilst *holding p true* (on the basis of evidence for p) is a state, whereas *making up one's mind that p* (on the basis of evidence for p) is a *process* or *event*, both are equally exercises of our agency. For this reason, thinks Boyle, we can apply the kind of account Moran gives of our knowledge of our own beliefs when we engage in the process of 'making up our minds' as to the truth of a proposition, to the static case of holding a proposition true. In both cases, thinks Boyle, the fact that believing is a manifestation of one's agency explains why believing that p is at the same time knowing oneself to believe that p .

But I am sceptical about whether the notion of doxastic agency is likely to explain why the two-in-one claim should be true. Say we grant that believing that p is actively holding p true, in some sense of 'active'. Why should the fact that I am active in having beliefs, rather than being passively subject to them, explain why believing that p and knowing that I believe it are not two distinct states but two aspects of the same state? Why should it even explain the weaker claim that believing that p is sufficient for knowing that I believe that p ?

Being an agent in relation to some event or state doesn't *per se* entail that one knows about that event or state: Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother. These were his acts, but he performed them unawares. Even granting that our beliefs manifest our agency, this alone doesn't explain why they should be (tacitly) known to their subjects, and still less why this knowledge should be an aspect of the belief itself.

What does seem plausible is that there is a strong (perhaps necessary) connection between acting *intentionally* and knowing what one is doing (Oedipus didn't kill his father or sleep with his mother intentionally).⁵ But this observation doesn't help explain doxastic self-knowledge in terms of doxastic agency either. For however we are to understand the idea that my believing that there will be a third world war is an 'act' of mine, the thought cannot be that my belief is one of my *intentional actions* – something Boyle himself rightly emphasises (Boyle 2011, 236–38, 2009). First, believing is a state, intentionally acting is not. And second, intentional actions are essentially done 'at will' (they are manifestations of one's will), but believing at will is at the very least not typical, and more likely not even possible.

Boyle has more to say about the relationship between the doxastic agency claim and the two-in-one claim than I have indicated here,⁶ and I don't claim to have provided a knock-down argument against the idea that transparent doxastic self-knowledge might in the end be explained

by appealing to the idea that beliefs are in some sense ‘acts’ of ours. For all I have said, it may be possible to do so.

My suspicion, though, is that thinking of one’s beliefs as manifesting one’s agency is something of a red herring when it comes to explaining the two-in-one claim. Whilst it would go beyond the scope of this paper to develop this suspicion into a detailed argument against the doxastic agency claim, I have wanted to indicate, in a very general way, the grounds on which my suspicion rests. If what I say in the rest of this paper is right, then whether or not doxastic agency can explain the two-in-one claim, it does not need to, for this explanatory work turns out to be done in another way.

We will only be able to see this after exploring the two-in-one claim in more detail. So let’s leave the doxastic agency claim to one side for now. I will come back to it in §4.3.

3. Some initial problems with the two-in-one claim (knowledge as belief)

Boyle recognises that in order to accept the two-in-one claim, then in addition to recognising the theoretical benefits it would bring *if* true, we need to understand why it *should be* true. As we have seen, he thinks that the requisite understanding will be underpinned by metaphysical considerations: the idea that beliefs are exercises of our doxastic agency was a claim about the metaphysics of belief. But I think we also need to pay attention to the metaphysics of knowledge.

This is because understanding why my belief that there will be a third world war and my knowledge that I believe this are two aspects of a single condition requires understanding what it is for a single condition to meet the requirements both on being a belief that *p* and on being knowledge that one believes that *p*. And this in turn requires understanding the general requirements on propositional knowledge.

Boyle doesn’t tell us what he thinks these requirements are. I will begin in this section by seeing what the two-in-one claim comes to in the context of the standard way of conceiving of them, turning to what I think is a better way in §4.

The standard metaphysics of knowledge holds that having propositional knowledge that *p* is having a true belief that *p* which meets some further epistemic condition, which is what ‘makes the difference’ between a *mere* true belief and knowledge. Because it sees knowledge as being (or being constituted by) a species of belief, I will refer to the standard metaphysics of knowledge as the ‘Belief Account of knowledge’ (sometimes just the ‘Belief Account’).

There are an enormous number of variations on the Belief Account, which differ significantly in how they understand the ‘further epistemic condition’ a true belief must meet in order to qualify as knowledge.⁷ For our purposes, we can think of the Belief Account as saying that knowing that *p* is a matter of having a true belief that *p* where there is *some* story to tell about the ‘further epistemic conditions’ which make the difference between mere true belief and knowledge.

In the context of the Belief Account of knowledge, the two-in-one claim becomes the claim that in having doxastic self-knowledge, I am in a single psychological condition which is at the same time a belief *that there will be* a third world war, and a belief *that I believe that* there will be a third world war, where the second-order belief is true (trivially, given that it comes along for free with my first-order belief), and meets some further epistemic condition which makes the difference for knowledge. For ease of reference, I will refer to this picture – the two-in-one claim understood in the context of the Belief Account – as ‘two-in-one-BA’.

Two-in-one-BA faces two related, and serious, problems which I think render it untenable. The first is that it leaves it unclear why the second-order belief counts as knowledge of the first-order belief. The second is that it seems no clearer how my belief that I believe that there will be a third world war could be a sustainable *aspect of* my belief that there will be a third world war than it was how my belief that I believe that there will be a third world war could be sustainably *inferred from* my belief that there will be a third world war.

Start with the first problem. Given that I believe that there will be a third world war (which we’re stipulating) my second-order belief that I believe that there will be a third world war is true. But not all true beliefs constitute knowledge of the truths captured by their contents. Why does my belief that I believe that there will be a third world war constitute knowledge?

Boyle doesn't think the Reflectivist needs to answer this question:

The reflectivist [...] denies that, in the normal, non-alienated case, being in a given mental state *M* and believing oneself to be in *M* are two distinct epistemic conditions, and consequently denies that the task of a theory of self-knowledge is to explain how these conditions come to stand in a relation that makes the latter knowledge of the former. (Boyle 2011, 235)

The idea is that it is only if one sees my second-order belief that I believe that there will be a third world war as distinct from my first-order belief that there will be one, that one will need to explain why (in addition to its being true) the former counts as knowledge of the latter. Boyle thinks that the Reflectivist, who accept the two-in-one claim and so thinks that beliefs *just are* a kind of state which are tacitly known merely in being held, need only describe the features of belief which explain why it would be tacitly known. And as we saw, he thinks this explanation follows from understanding beliefs as exercises of our rational agency. (I raised worries for the doxastic agency claim, but recall we are parking these concerns.)

But as far as I can see, merely accepting the two-in-one claim does not buy the Reflectivist the right to ignore this question. If my second-order belief that I believe that there will be a third world war is knowledge that I believe that there will be a third world war, this will be – according to the Belief Account – because it is true, *and* because it meets some further epistemic condition. So understanding why I have doxastic self-knowledge requires describing the 'further epistemic condition' my second-order belief meets, in virtue of which it is knowledge, and explaining why it meets it. This epistemological demand is not undermined merely by seeing my second-order belief as part of the same cognitive state as the first-order belief it concerns.

To get a clearer view of the problem, we need to distinguish two explanatory demands faced by someone (like e.g. Byrne) who treats a first- and a second-order belief as genuinely distinct, demands which Boyle seems to conflate. The first – metaphysical or psychological – demand is that of explaining how one *comes by* a second-order belief, given a first-order one, and the second – epistemological – demand is to explain, given both a first- and a second-order belief, why the latter *counts as knowledge* of the former. By accepting the two-in-one claim, the Reflectivist escapes the metaphysical/psychological demand, because there's simply no question of 'getting from' a second-order belief from a first-order belief if they are two aspects of the same

cognitive state. But merely rolling one's first- and second-order beliefs into the same cognitive state neither answers, nor removes the need to answer, the epistemological demand to explain why the second-order belief counts as knowledge of the first-order belief.

Without an explanation of why my (true) second-order belief amounts to knowledge, two-in-one-BA does not – as it promised – explain doxastic self-knowledge, but simply presupposes it.

Can the Reflectivist rescue two-in-one-BA by supplying the missing explanation of why my true second-order belief that I believe that there will be a third world war constitutes knowledge? I'm not sure they can, at least not without betraying the spirit of Reflectivism, which after all was advertised as an alternative to approaches which see the task of a theory of doxastic self-knowledge as being to explain how a second-order belief 'comes to stand in a relation that makes' it knowledge of the first-order belief it concerns (Boyle 2011, 235; 239).

Let's move on to the second problem facing two-in-one-BA.

In brief, the second problem is understanding how my second-order belief *that I believe that there will be a third world war* is any more sustainable in a Reflectivist framework than Boyle (rightly, to my mind) argued it to be in an Inferentialist framework.

To re-cap, Boyle thought that even if we grant Byrne that I might 'make an inference' from *there will be a third world war* to *I believe that there will be a third world war* in the sense of being (in some sense) prompted to judge *that I believe that there will be a third world war* by the premise *that* (as it appears to me) *there will be a third world war*, it is another matter to see how I could continue to endorse the proposition *that I believe that there will be a third world war*, simply on the grounds *that* (as it appears to me) *there will be one*. Believing some proposition is continuing to endorse it, and continuing to endorse it is continuing to see it as to-be-believed. The mere fact that (as it seems to me) *there will be a third world war* doesn't show that *that I believe that there will be a third world war* is to-be-believed – unless I am suffering delusions of omniscience, which, we are assuming, I am not.

Boyle represents these considerations as posing a problem for the claim that my second-order belief is inferred from my first-order belief. I think Boyle is right to insist that holding a

belief on the basis of inference isn't just a matter of 'stepping' from one belief (e.g. p) to another (e.g. *I believe that p*). It is a matter of continuing to see the latter as supported by the former.

But rejecting the idea that my belief *that I believe that there will be a third world war* is *inferred from* the proposition that *there will be one* does not remove the need to understand how my belief *that I believe that there will be a third world war* is sustainable. The Reflectivist also needs to explain the datum that I continue to endorse the proposition *that I believe that there will be a third world war*; that I continue to see this proposition as to-be-believed. What are the considerations in light of which this proposition *does* strike me as to-be-believed?

The answer seems to be: there aren't any! The observation that my doxastic self-knowledge is 'transparent' was precisely the observation that the only kind of facts I will consider (if I consider any) in coming to know that I believe that there will be a third world war are facts relevant to *whether there will be one* – that facts pertaining to *whether I believe that there will be one* are not considerations in light of which I see *the proposition that I believe that there will be a third world war* as to-be-believed.

So for the Reflectivist, as for the Inferentialist, it is hard to see how my belief *that I believe that there will be a third world war* is sustainable, because it is hard to see what makes the proposition *that I believe that there will be a third world war* appear to me as to-be-believed, rather than as not-to-be-believed (or to-be-disbelieved).

So two-in-one-BA doesn't seem to do much better than Byrne's Inferentialism, and interestingly, the problems it faces seem very similar. Both views have difficulty explaining first, why my second-order belief *that I believe that there will be a third world war* should count as knowledge that this is what I believe, and second, how I could sustain this second-order belief. In neither case does rolling my second-order belief into my first-order belief seem to help. If Inferentialism is untenable, as Boyle argued it is, and as I agreed, then so is two-in-one-BA.

This conclusion might strike the reader as contradicting my claim in §2 that the two-in-one claim is compelling in virtue of (*inter alia*) overcoming the problems inherent in Inferentialism. But it is important to keep the two-in-one claim separate from two-in-one-BA. The two-in-one claim is the claim that my belief that there will be a third world war, and my knowledge that I believe that there will be a third world war are two aspects of a single condition. Two-in-one-BA

is an *interpretation* of the two-in-one claim; it is the form the two-in-one claim takes when understood in the context of the Belief Account of knowledge. This section has argued only that two-in-one-BA is untenable.

Anyone who, like me, finds the two-in-one claim compelling, but two-in-one-BA untenable, must reject the Belief Account of knowledge.

4. Saving the two-in-one claim (knowledge as ability)

The two-in-one claim needs to be understood in the context of an alternative metaphysics of knowledge to that offered by the Belief Account. Without wanting to suggest that it is the only viable candidate, in this section I will locate the two-in-one claim in an account of knowledge which has been defended by John Hyman (esp. 1999; 2015) – what I will call ‘the Ability Account of knowledge’ (sometime just ‘the Ability Account’).⁸

In §4.1 I outline the Ability Account, explaining both what the two-in-one claim comes to in this context, and why the problems raised in §3 for two-in-one-BA simply don’t arise for the resulting picture. In §4.2, I explain how, in addition, locating the two-in-one claim in an Ability Account of knowledge explains why it should be true. Returning to the doxastic agency claim, in §4.3 I suggest that the picture presented in this section leaves the doxastic agency claim with no explanatory role to play in an account of doxastic self-knowledge.

4.1. The Ability Account of knowledge

According to Hyman’s Ability Account, propositional knowledge is the ability to use a fact as a reason, or – as he sometimes puts it – the ability to be guided by a fact. More precisely,

A knows that *p* if and only if the fact that *p* can be *A*’s reason for doing, believing, wanting or doubting something. (Hyman 1999, 442)

The list, ‘doing, believing, wanting or doubting’ is suggestive rather than exhaustive. Indeed,

[a]ny verb can be added [to ‘doing’, ‘believing’ etc.] which can occur in a sentence of the form ‘*A*’s reason for ϕ -ing was that *p*. (Hyman 1999, 441)

To get a feel for the view, consider an example from outside the sphere of self-knowledge. My knowing that today is Sunday is a matter of my being able to use the fact that today is Sunday as reason for *believing* or *wanting* or *feeling* or *doing* or (etc.) something. I might use the fact that today is Sunday as a reason for *believing that Emily will be home tomorrow*, or for *doing my washing*, or for *feeling happy*, or *apprehensive*, or whatever.

Consider now my doxastic self-knowledge. According to the Ability Account, my knowing that I believe that there will be a third world war is a matter of my being able to use the fact *that I believe that there will be a third world war* as a reason. And the two-in-one claim now comes to the claim that I have this ability *simply in believing* that there will be a third world war. Call this picture – which results from putting the two-in-one claim in the context of an Ability Account of knowledge – ‘two-in-one-AA’. In a moment I will explain why two-in-one-AA plausibly seems true, but first let’s see how it fares in relation to the problems which arose for two-in-one-BA.

These problems were related: they both turned on the fact that, according to two-in-one-BA, my second-order belief was an aspect of my first-order belief, and that due to transparency, I hold this second-order belief independently of considerations which appear to me to bear on its truth. It was hard to see how such a second-order belief could meet an epistemic condition fit to render it knowledge (according to the Belief Account), and hard too, to see how it could be sustainable.

Compare two-in-one-AA: according to this, my second-order knowledge isn’t constituted by a second-order belief, but is embodied in my ability to use the fact that I have the first-order belief as a reason. Two-in-one-AA allows that I *know that* I believe that there will be a third world war without attributing to me a *belief that* I believe that there will be a third world war. Because it makes no reference to a second-order belief, two-in-one-AA *a fortiori* need not explain how such a second-order belief could meet any epistemic condition fit to render it knowledge, nor how it could be sustainable. The problems which Boyle raised for Inferentialism, and which I argued also face two-in-one-BA, specifically target the second-order belief which both views posit. Because two-in-one-AA doesn’t posit any such second-order belief, it simply avoids these problems.

Before moving on, I want to stave off a potential worry about the Ability Account of knowledge.⁹ The worry is that it seems to be a part of our concept of knowledge that it must be epistemically well-grounded in some way, and that this aspect of our concept seems to go missing

on the Ability Account: how *could* knowledge be the ability to use a fact as a reason, given that on this characterisation, knowledge seems to have nothing to do with evidence, justification, and the like?

There are two points to make in response. The first is that in the context of trying to understand transparent doxastic self-knowledge, it is odd to complain that the Ability Account of knowledge represents the concept of knowledge as not *per se* linking to concepts like justification and evidence. After all, the transparency idea is precisely that doxastic self-knowledge seems to lack these very links.

The second point is that it's wrong to think that an Ability Account must deny *any* link between knowing and having justification, evidence, etc. In particular, we can allow that there are species of knowledge which do require having good epistemic grounds. Part of Hyman's thinking is that there is an important distinction between what knowledge is and how we come by it, a distinction which gets conflated in standard approaches to understanding knowledge (Hyman 1999, 434–35). This leaves open the possibility of holding that knowledge is a condition which can be acquired in different ways in different kinds of case: when it comes to ordinary empirical knowledge of how things are outside our minds, for example, acquisition might depend on having good evidence, reasons, and so on. But it allows that when it comes to facts about our own mental states, evidence and reasons would be otiose. Indeed, attention to the 'transparent' nature of doxastic self-knowledge seems to suggest that this is exactly what we should say in relation to knowledge of this kind. For someone attracted to the two-in-one claim, such an approach ought to look particularly attractive, since the two-in-one claim entails that having a first-order belief is sufficient for having doxastic self-knowledge. In thinking of the first-order belief as sufficient for self-knowledge, we deny that we also require reasons or evidence (etc.) for the proposition known.

4.2.Explaining the two-in-one claim

So far, I have explained what the two-in-one claim looks like in the context of the Ability Account of knowledge, and I have explained why the resulting picture (two-in-one-AA) avoids the problems faced by the two-in-one claim in the context of the Belief Account of knowledge (two-in-one-BA).

Still, we might ask, does two-in-one-AA look, plausibly, *true*? That is, is it plausibly true that simply in believing that there will be a third world war, I am able to use the fact *that I believe that there will be a third world war* as a reason. I think that this is indeed very plausible.¹⁰

There are a variety of ways in which I might use the fact that I believe that there will be a third world war as a reason. Consider just one, in the following case: whilst participating in a political focus group, the group leader instructs us, ‘Everyone who believes that there will be a third world war, put up your hand’, and I put up my hand.¹¹ It seems undeniable that I have put up my hand, in part, *because I believe that there will be a third world war*. And it seems equally plausible that here I use the fact that I believe that there will be a third world war as a reason – for putting up my hand.¹²

Of course, this is not a case in which I use the fact that I believe that there will be a third world war as my *only* reason for putting up my hand. I put up my hand, in addition, because the group leader gave the instruction she did, and because I don’t want to mislead anyone about my beliefs. But this isn’t a problem: it is no part of Hyman’s account of knowledge that someone who knows that *p* is able to use the fact that *p* as her *only* reason for doing (etc.) something.

It might be objected at this point that in cases like the one I have described, I only have the ability to use the fact that I believe that there will be a third world war as a reason, in virtue of *believing that I believe that there will be a third world war*. If this is the case, then we would be left with a second-order belief after all, and would presumably need to explain the relationship between them.

But I don’t think this is a huge worry. It seems like an implausibly overly intellectualistic description of the case to insist that such an ability must rest on my having a second-order belief. Beliefs are themselves states which have motivational potential. It seems very strange to demand that this potential can only manifest itself for a belief which happens to be the object of a second-order belief.

Compare another kind of state which seems to have inherent motivational potential: pain. Say I have a toothache, so avoid biting into hard pieces of food. It is plausible here, I suggest, that I am using the fact that I have a toothache as a reason for avoiding biting into hard pieces of food. It is hard to see how we could be adding to our understanding of the case by insisting that I could

only have this ability in virtue of believing that I have a toothache. My sense is that a toothache is just the kind of condition such that being in it gives one reason to get out of it.¹³ Just so, beliefs just seem to be the kind of condition such that having them gives us a reason to express them under certain conditions, such as when we are asked to do so, and want to cooperate.

There is more to say here, no doubt. A full development of the kind of view I am introducing would require explaining in more detail *why* believing is the kind of condition such that just being in it gives one a reason to use the fact that one is in it as a reason. There isn't space to do this work here. All I have wanted to suggest in this section is that it is plausible that belief *is* such a state, that *ceteris paribus*, my believing that there will be a third world war *ipso facto* means that I am able to use the fact that I so believe as a reason – in the case we have considered, as a reason to put up my hand. I have been suggesting that this is at least as plausible as (if not more plausible than) the claim that in order to have this ability I need to believe that I believe that there will be a third world war.

4.3. Doing without doxastic agency

I argued in the previous section that two-in-one-BA is untenable, so that those like me who find the two-in-one claim attractive, must reject the Belief Account of knowledge. In this section I have done two things. First, I have explained how the problems facing two-in-one-BA simply don't arise for two-in-one-AA: because there is no need to posit a second-order belief, we avoid having to explain how such a belief can meet any epistemic condition, and how it could be sustainable. Second, I have explained why, in the context of an Ability Account of knowledge, the two-in-one claim looks plausibly true: I suggested that it is plausible that in believing that there will be a third world war, I have the ability to use the fact that I so believe as a reason – as a reason, in the example above, for putting up my hand. On an Ability Account of knowledge, this means that it is plausible that my believing that there will be a third world war, and my knowing myself to believe this, part and parcel of a single condition, just as the two-in-one claim holds.¹⁴

We have been concentrating on the two-in-one claim, but I promised above to come back to the doxastic agency claim. This said that the two-in-one claim is true because our beliefs are exercises of our doxastic agency. In §2 I explained why I was sceptical of explaining the two-in-

one claim in terms of doxastic agency. But whether or not I was right about its *ability* to explain the two-in-one claim, if what I have said in this section is right, there is simply *no need* for the notion of doxastic agency to do so. The doxastic agency claim has no explanatory role left to play, because an explanation of the two-in-one claim simply falls out when we place it in the context of an Ability Account of knowledge. Explaining the two-in-one claim has required paying attention to the metaphysics of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

I have distinguished two claims in Reflectivism as Boyle develops it. What I have been calling ‘the two-in-one claim’ is aimed at explaining why our doxastic self-knowledge is transparent, in terms of the idea that believing some proposition and knowing oneself to believe it are not two separate conditions, but two aspects of a single condition. And what I have been calling ‘the doxastic agency claim’ is aimed at explaining why the two-in-one claim should be true, by appealing to the idea that our beliefs are in some sense manifestations of our agency.

I found (in §2) the two-in-one claim initially compelling, and the doxastic agency claim less so. I then argued (in §3 and §4) that whether the two-in-one claim is ultimately tenable depends on the *metaphysics of knowledge* within which it is understood. I argued that it is untenable in the context of the Belief Account of knowledge, but that it is tenable on an Ability Account of knowledge. In addition, I suggested that if we make the move of putting the two-in-one claim together with an Ability Account of knowledge, there is no need to appeal to the doxastic agency claim, for the Ability Account *also* explains why the two-in-one claim should be true.

I would like to end by remarking on the *distinctiveness* of doxastic self-knowledge, on the account I have offered.

At the end of ‘Transparent Self-Knowledge’, Boyle suggests that the key insight of Reflectivism is that ‘the proper account of self-knowledge [including *doxastic* self-knowledge] is a distinctive *kind* of knowing’ (Boyle 2011, 239), contrasting an approach which sees things in this way to an approach which thinks of self-knowledge as ‘not different in principle from knowledge of other objects, however special the epistemological details may be’ (ibid.).

The view I have offered agrees in one sense that doxastic self-knowledge is a distinctive kind of knowledge, but disagrees in another. Both the agreement, and the disagreement, are benefits of the account I have offered.

The sense in which my account disagrees with Boyle's about doxastic self-knowledge's distinctiveness can be seen when we note that I have not suggested that we adopt an Ability Account *only* when we are trying to understand self-knowledge, but that we adopt an Ability Account as a general account of knowledge – as describing the metaphysical shape which propositional knowledge will take in *any* case – whether what one knows is that today is Sunday, or that there is such a creature as a Kodiak bear, or that one believes that there will be a third world war. Insofar as it is the ability to use a fact as a reason, then, my knowledge that I believe that there will be a third world war is not different in form to any other bit of knowledge, including those bits of non-self-knowledge just listed.

And this is a bonus of the account I have given, because it enables us to understand how doxastic self-knowledge has as much right to be called knowledge as does my knowledge that today is a Sunday, or that the Kodiak bear exists. This would be left unexplained by an account of doxastic self-knowledge as completely 'different in principle' to knowledge of other kinds: such an account would be lacking a description of the *genus* to which both doxastic self-knowledge and 'ordinary' bits of knowledge, like my knowledge that today is a Sunday, belong.

Yet in another sense, the account I have given *does* represent doxastic self-knowledge as knowledge of a special kind. For – accepting as it does the two-in-one claim – it represents my doxastic self-knowledge that I believe that there will be a third world war as part-and-parcel with my first-order belief *that there will be one*. This is just what Boyle wanted Reflectivism to do. What I have suggested is that we can only do this by rejecting the standard metaphysics of knowledge as (constituted by) a kind of belief. An Ability Account of knowledge provides a promising alternative.

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Notes

¹ Failing to give a positive explanation of why judgments formed by reasoning in accordance with the Doxastic Schema do constitute knowledge is rather odd in the context of an account which at points advertises itself as *explaining* doxastic self-knowledge. One way of understanding Boyle's criticisms below is plausibly as a version of the demand for Byrne to respond to just this worry.

² That is not to say that Boyle is the only philosopher to hold a version of the claim. It is shared in some form by various proponents of 'constitutivism' about self-knowledge. For other versions of the idea, see e.g. (Heal 1994; Shoemaker 1994; Rödl 2007).

³ This would include a person's knowledge of many of her mental states other than belief, but also plausibly her 'practical knowledge' of what she is intentionally doing. An influential contemporary version of the idea that the two-in-one claim is also true for practical knowledge, is embodied in Anscombe's characterisation of this knowledge as 'the cause of what it understands' (Anscombe 2000, 87). I provide an account of practical self-knowledge which takes its mark from Anscombe's, and has much in common with the account of doxastic self-knowledge I develop below, in (Campbell 2017).

⁴ For more on this idea, from Boyle's perspective, see (Boyle 2009).

⁵ For the canonical defence of this kind of view, see Anscombe (1957). For an influential (putative) counterexample, see Davidson (2001, 50), and for a response on Anscombe's behalf, see Thompson (2011, 209–10).

⁶ A key thought in Boyle's discussion, and in other agentialist accounts of self-knowledge is that it is the p-believer's responsiveness to her reasons for believing that p which somehow grounds her knowledge that she believes that p. In the current context, the thing to note is that it is not obvious how the idea of *agency* does any work in this picture: why is responsiveness to reasons essentially an agential matter? One line of thought links our reasons-responsiveness to a particular kind of responsibility which we seem to bear for our beliefs, and to the thought that responsibility is characteristic of agency. There are two problems here. First, the appeal to agency again looks like a red herring – the appeal to reasons-responsiveness and responsibility seems to do all the work. More seriously, I doubt that an account of self-knowledge can be grounded in an account of reasons-responsiveness and responsibility, since plausibly an account of responsibility – whether in the practical or in the theoretical sphere – *presupposes* self-knowledge, and so cannot explain it. Here is not the place to develop these thoughts, but I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to say something about the idea that doxastic self-knowledge might be somehow grounded in reasoning.

⁷ This further condition has been variously understood as *justification*, *safety*, *sensitivity*, *truth-tracking*, having been *caused by the fact known*, *produced by a reliable mechanism*, and so on. Happily, we need not choose between these here, because I am interested in whether the two-in-one claim can be understood in the context of the Belief Account rather generally. It's worth noting that the Belief Account is also neutral on the debate between reductionists and anti-reductionists about knowledge. One might hold that knowledge is true belief which meets some further epistemic condition, without expecting that this 'further epistemic condition' can be defined reductively, that is, without using the concept of knowledge.

⁸ The only other metaphysics of knowledge I can think of which would appear likely to provide a happy home for the two-in-one claim is a *Mere True Belief* account of knowledge, along the lines of that defended by Crispin Sartwell (1991; 1992; see also Skidmore 1997). Given the unpopularity of such a 'Mere True Belief' account, however, the picture embodied in what we might call 'two-in-one-MTB' is unlikely to attract many followers, and I won't consider it here.

⁹ Here is not the place to defend the Ability Account in detail. For Hyman's own responses to a battery of objections, see (Hyman 2015, 7.3). The worry I consider here was put by an anonymous reviewer for this journal.

¹⁰ Hyman himself points out that his conception of knowledge is very well-placed to accommodate self-knowledge (Hyman 2015, 7.4). Hyman does not develop the kind of account I offer here: in particular, he does not endorse the two-in-one claim.

¹¹ Thanks to Casey Doyle and Alexander Greenberg for discussion here.

¹² What about cases where a person fails to know about her first-order belief? There are two ways to go in explaining such cases, on the view I am offering. We could say that first-order beliefs are sufficient for the knowledge-ability as long as nothing gets in the way. Or, we could say that having the first-order belief is always sufficient for *having* the knowledge-ability, but that this ability can (like any ability) be *masked*. This would entail that strictly, all first-order beliefs are objects of doxastic self-knowledge, but that this knowledge cannot always be manifested. It would take further work to consider which of these two options is preferable. Here I only want to note that there are options, on the view I am recommending, for explaining our fallibility with respect to our own beliefs. Note too that any constitutivist account – any account which accepts a version of the two-in-one claim – is under this kind of explanatory demand, so that it is not a particular problem for my version of the view.

¹³ Although my topic here is *doxastic* self-knowledge, this example also shows that my account can very happily be extended to self-knowledge of other of our mental states. Indeed, I find it plausible to think that a mental state just is a state such that being in it is typically sufficient for using the fact that one is in it as a reason. That is, mental states are states which have an inherent rational-motivational potential. Here is not the place to argue for this claim, however, and I leave it for future work.

¹⁴ Although there is not room to do so in this paper, I would like to develop the idea that my belief that there will be a third world war is what *underwrites* or *grounds* the ability to use the fact that there will be a third world war as a reason. That would give us a picture on which my second-order knowledge relates to my first-order belief as ability

to ground. See (Campbell 2017) for some ideas about how a parallel picture might help us to understand practical self-knowledge.