Knowing what it is like and the three "Rs"

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1. Introduction

Knowledge often begins with experience. But one form of knowledge—the knowledge one has when one knows *what it is like* to do something—seems to be tied to experience in an especially intimate way. For it is often suggested that, at least in normal circumstances, one can know what it is like to Φ only if one has had an experience of Φ-ing oneself (Lewis 1990, Paul 2014). So, you can know what it is like to, say, fall in love only if you have had the experience of falling in love yourself, and you can know what it is like to eat durian only if you have experienced eating durian, and so on.

The exact status of this *experience condition* is a matter of some debate, and the issue is complicated by the fact that 'what it is like' ('WIL' for short) knowledge can plausibly come in degrees (Cath 2019, Lee 2023). Still, it is undeniable that WIL-knowledge paradigmatically begins with experience. The question I want to explore here is this: Given these tight connections between WIL-knowledge and experience, when and how does this form of knowledge manage to persist once the experiences involved in acquiring it have ended?

In some cases, one might be tempted to say that once the generating experience has gone so has the knowledge of what it is like. Montero (2020) for example has argued that one cannot remember what it is like to have certain kinds of pain experiences. So, Montero (2020) writes: "although I can remember *that* labour pains hurt, I can't remember what they felt like." Perhaps some WIL-knowledge is 'fleeting' then in the sense that it not only begins with experience, but also ends with it.

More generally, however, WIL-knowledge often endures long after the generating experience has faded. It has sadly been much too long since I last had goody gumdrops ice cream, as this is a flavour only available in New Zealand and I live in Australia. But I still know what it is like to eat and taste goody gumdrops, and it is that knowledge which I draw on in strongly

recommending this ice cream to you if you ever visit New Zealand. And, more significantly, it is much too long since I saw my mother's face, but I still know what it is like to see my mother's face, and it is this knowledge which explains why I will only be happy, and not surprised, when I go to New Zealand and see her face again.

So, in these cases where we do retain WIL-knowledge over time, how do we do this? The ability hypothesis, as developed by Lewis (1990), points us towards an attractive answer, namely, that retaining knowledge of WIL to Φ is a matter of retaining abilities to (re)imagine, remember, and recognise experiences of Φ-ing. But there are various questions and concerns one can raise with this view—I will call it *the retention hypothesis*—that we retain WIL-knowledge in virtue of retaining these abilities. One concern is that the retention hypothesis might seem to commit us to the ability hypothesis, which is a worry because all kinds of objections have been made to that account of WIL-knowledge, and the view has few proponents today. Another issue is that, as we will see, the ability conditions that Lewis gave us are ambiguous and under described in multiple ways, such that the view requires significant elaboration before it can be properly considered and assessed.

The purpose of this chapter then is to update and further develop the retention hypothesis to address such concerns, with a particular focus on the role of the imagination condition in retaining WIL-knowledge. In §2 I will show how a plausible ambiguity claim about knowing-WIL ascriptions suggests that there are two importantly different kinds of epistemic states denoted by these different disambiguations of knowing-WIL ascriptions—an objectual form of knowledge and an interrogative form of knowledge. And I will then suggest that the retention hypothesis applies to both forms of WIL-knowledge. In §3 I will first show how the ambiguity in knowing-WIL ascriptions is mirrored by a corresponding ambiguity in Lewis' ability conditions.I will then argue that the objectual interpretation is the most plausible interpretation for analysing all three of Lewis' ability conditions, and I will offer some further reflections on how to interpret these conditions once we focus in on this objectual interpretation. In §4 I will close by considering questions about the relative priority and independence of Lewis' three ability conditions, and I will argue that there is a good sense in which the ability to imagine condition is the most important of these three conditions. This discussion will also help us to clarify the issue of 'fleeting' WIL-knowledge.

2. Disambiguating WIL-Knowledge

There are three main views of the nature of WIL-knowledge, namely, the ability hypothesis, the acquaintance hypothesis, and what I will call 'intellectualism', which respectively analyse knowing what it is like to Φ in terms of abilities, acquaintance relations, and propositional knowledge (including views which appeal to distinctive 'phenomenal concepts' involved in the possession of that propositional knowledge).

These views are typically viewed as rival positions but I think on closer inspection this need not be the case. The reason has to do with the plausible claim, following Stoljar (2016), that knowing-WIL ascriptions are ambiguous between an interrogative and an objectual interpretation, which track two importantly different kinds of epistemic states. The interrogative reading of 'Mary knows what it is like to have a migraine' tells us that Mary knows an answer to the question 'what is it like to have a migraine?'. But on the free-relative interpretation what Mary knows is the thing denoted by the referring expression 'what is it like to have a migraine?', which is presumably the experience of having a migraine.

If we accept this ambiguity claim then it becomes plausible that at least two of the three main accounts of WIL-knowledge can be viewed as each being partly (but not fully) correct, in the sense that each account corrects analyses the epistemic states denoted by one, but not both, of these disambiguations. Note first that intellectualism clearly provides the most natural account of the epistemic states ascribed by the interrogative reading, for knowing an answer to an embedded question is usually thought to be a matter of knowing some relevant proposition. And, roughly following Stoljar (2016), I will assume that the relevant form of proposition that one knows when knows what it is like to Φ (in the interrogative sense) is a proposition of the form '*w* is a way that it feels to Φ'.

But intellectualism may not be plausible account of the epistemic states denoted by the free-relative, or objectual, interpretation of knowing-WIL ascriptions. For, in a tradition tracing back to Russell (1912), it is often claimed that knowing a thing, or objectual knowledge, is not generally analysable in terms of merely knowing truths about that thing, and that at least some forms of objectual knowledge are a distinctive and non-propositional kind of knowledge.[1]

If objectual WIL-knowledge is not a form of knowing-that this still leaves us with the ability and acquaintance hypotheses as other possible accounts of this form of knowledge. The

[1] Of course, these claims are contestable, but I cannot explore these issues here. For discussion of these issues, see Farkas (2019).

acquaintance hypothesis is an obvious contender as it is a view which explicitly analyses WIL-knowledge as a kind of sui generis objectual knowledge where the 'object' one knows is the experience of Φ-ing itself, or the way it feels to Φ. So, for example, Conee (1994) holds that knowing what it is like to see something red is a matter of knowing the experience of seeing something red, which he takes to be a matter of having such an experience and being directly aware of it.

But it is not the only contender here, as Stoljar (2018) has argued for the perhaps surprising conclusion that Lewis' ability hypothesis is best interpreted as an account of objectual WIL-knowledge. So, we have two competing accounts of objectual WIL-knowledge on the table: (1) the view that objectual WIL-knowledge is a form of acquaintance knowledge (which on Conee's view is a matter having an experience and being directly aware of it), and (2) the view that objectual WIL-knowledge is a kind of ability knowledge (which on Lewis' view is a matter of having abilities to remember, imagine, and recognise). And if either one of these views gives us the correct account of objectual WIL-knowledge, and if intellectualism gives us the correct account of interrogative WIL-knowledge, then we can say that two of the three main accounts of WIL-knowledge are each partially correct insofar as they each give us the correct account of one of the two kinds of epistemic states denoted by these two distinct interpretations of knowing-WIL ascriptions.

Furthermore, there could even be a sense in which all three views of WIL-knowledge can be regarded as being partially correct. This is because even once we focus in on just objectual WIL-knowledge there could still be a sense in which both the acquaintance hypothesis and the ability hypothesis can be seen as being partially correct. For as Conee (1994: 139) discusses a proponent of the acquaintance hypothesis could reject the ability hypothesis but still regard Lewis' abilities as conditions involved in knowing an experience over time after the experience has ended. On this approach then one can see the acquaintance hypothesis as giving us the correct account of what is involved in knowing an experience at the time one is having it, and the ability hypothesis as pointing us to the correct account of what is involved in retaining that knowledge after the experience is over. And Conee's position nicely illustrates then how someone can endorse the retention hypothesis whilst rejecting the ability hypothesis.

Of course, a proponent of the ability hypothesis should reject Conee's view and insist that the WIL-knowledge you have at the time of the experience can also be identified with the possession of Lewis' three abilities. I will not try to adjudicate such debates here. For either

way the retention hypothesis will still be plausible for objectual WIL-knowledge. If the ability hypothesis is the correct analysis of objectual WIL-knowledge then the retention hypothesis trivially follows because knowing what it is like to Φ (in the objectual sense) is identified with possessing the abilities to imagine, remember, and recognise experiences of Φ-ing, and so one will retain that knowledge only if one retains those abilities. On the other hand, if the acquaintance hypothesis is true and knowing what it is like to Φ (in the objectual sense) when one is Φ-ing is a matter of having the experience and being aware of it, it still seems plausible, as Conee discusses, that retaining this knowledge over time is a matter of possessing Lewis' abilities.

But what about interrogative WIL-knowledge? I think it is also plausible that the retaining of this knowledge crucially involves the possession of Lewis' abilities. The reasons for this are connected to the fact that the experience condition has prima facie appeal with respect to not just objectual but also interrogative WIL-knowledge.

The idea that the experience condition applies to objectual WIL-knowledge is straightforward to motivate as objectual knowledge is often thought to be subject to some kind of acquaintance or 'contact' condition with the known object. So, it is common to suggest, say, that to know Norwich one must have been to that fine city at some point in time, or that to know Steve Coogan you must have met him and been in his presence. So, similarly, one might think that to know, say, the experience of skydiving one must have had an experience of skydiving oneself.

But the experience condition also has appeal with respect to interrogative WIL-knowledge. This point can be brought out by considering Jackson's famous case of Mary and the black-and-white room. When Mary leaves her room and sees something red for the first time it seems that Mary would not only come to gain new objectual WIL-knowledge but also now Mary might well exclaim "I always wondered what it would be like to see something red, and now I know". The use of 'wondered' forces the interrogative reading of 'what it would be like to see something red' (Stoljar 2016, 2018) as what one wonders is what the true propositional answer is to that question. It seems very plausible that Mary could make such a remark,[2] and one

[2] In response to Jackson's knowledge argument, some theorists want to maintain that if Mary really knew *all* the physical facts, she would also know what it is like to Φ. But for our purposes we could sidestep such issues by shifting instead to Paul's (2014) case of 'ordinary Mary' who lacks Mary's omniscience with respect to all the physical facts.

natural explanation one could give of her previous lack of this interrogative WIL-knowledge is that having the experience of seeing something red is required for possessing that knowledge.

Assuming that something like the experience condition does apply to interrogative WIL-knowledge, then we face an issue of explaining how a propositional form of knowledge could be subject to such a condition. One very broad approach to this problem is to to appeal to some kind of phenomenal way of knowing, or mode of presentation, condition such that possessing interrogative WIL-knowledge is a matter not only of knowing a proposition that addresses the embedded WIL-question but also possessing that knowledge in a distinctively phenomenal way.[3] On some accounts knowing in a phenomenal way will entail that one has had an experience of Φ-ing oneself.[4] On other accounts it will only entail the possession of Lewis' abilities, but this will make it likely that one has had an experience of Φ-ing, given Lewis' observation that, in normal circumstances, one will have had to have an experience of Φ-ing (or some relevantly similar experience) in order to possess these abilities.[5]

More could be said on these matters, but I think the above remarks suffice to motivate the idea that when one knows what it is like to Φ, in either the objectual or interrogative sense, one will usually stand in a special relation to the experience of Φ-ing. And this idea helps to explain the appeal of the retention hypothesis, including its appeal to philosophers who do not endorse the ability hypothesis, like Conee (1994). For the retention hypothesis offers us an account of how this distinctive relation to the experience of Φ-ing could be retained over time because, as we will see in the discussion to come, each of Lewis' abilities can be of thought of as an ability to be *reacquainted* with the experience of Φ-ing in a certain way.

[3] This kind of view closely parallels Stanley and Williamson's (2001) well-known intellectualist account of knowing how to Φ in terms of knowing, under a practical mode of presentation, that *w* is a way for oneself to Φ. See Tye (2011) and Cath (2019) for related discussion.

[4] So, for example, one might claim that knowing, in a phenomenal way, that *w* is a way that it feels to Φ involves the possession of a special experience entailing concept of *w* (see Tye 2011 for a view in this neighbourhood, and many proponents of the 'phenomenal concept strategy' will be committed to views like this). Or one might forgo any appeal to special concepts, but still try to characterise the attitude of WIL-knowledge in such a way that it is experience entailing (Grzankowski and Tye 2019).

[5] See, for example, Lee (2023) for an account of WIL-knowledge one which it involves the possession of a phenomenal concept the possession of which will entail the possession of similar abilities to those that Lewis identifies. And see Cath (2023) for a view which charcaterises the attitude of WIL-knowledge in such a way that possessing such knowledge entails the possession of Lewis' abilities.

3. Interpreting the three "Rs"

We can now start to examine the retention hypothesis more closely, or rather 'hypothese*s*' as the suggestion is that retaining both objectual and interrogative WIL-knowledge over time is a matter, at least partly, of retaining Lewis' abilities. In §3 we will consider questions about whether the possession of any one of these abilities is a necessary and/or sufficient condition for possessing WIL-knowledge of either kind. But, for now, I will assume that possessing WIL-knowledge (objectual or interrogative)[6] broadly requires the possession of these abilities, as what I want to consider is how these abilities are best interpreted so as to make that assumption as plausible as possible.

Before looking at each ability individually, we can note one important clarification upfront which applies to all three ability conditions. For Lewis, the ability to imagine, remember, and recognise, an experience of smelling a skunk just is the ability to imagine, remember, and recognise *what it is like* to have an experience of smelling a skunk. This is because on Lewis's view (1990, fn. 12 p. 461), the expression "what experience E is like" denotes experience E. But if we characterise Lewis' abilities in this way then the very same ambiguity we found in knowing-WIL ascriptions—between the objectual versus interrogative reading of the WIL-expression—will also be present in Lewis' ability conditions. So, for example, we could interpret "an ability to remember what it is like to experience eating vegemite" as either something like "an ability to remember the experience of eating vegemite" or as "an ability to remember that *p*, for some proposition *p* that answers the question 'WIL to experience eating vegemite?".

The most faithful disambiguation in regards to interpreting Lewis is clearly the objectual given that he takes "what experience E is like" to denote the experience E, rather than a question. But, more importantly, in what follows I will argue that the objectual interpretation is independently the most plausible way of interpreting each of these three ability conditions, and I will offer some thoughts on how to unpack these ability conditions further once they are given that objectual reading.

[6] Note that in the rest of the chapter whenever I say 'WIL-knowledge' (or 'knowing-WIL') without qualification that should be interpreted as referring to both objectual and interrogative WIL-knowledge. When there is a need to speak about just one of these forms of knowledge I will add 'objectual' or 'interrogative' as appropriate.

3.1 Reimagining

Starting with Lewis' ability to imagine condition the first, and most simple, clarification to make is that the ability to imagine what it is like to Φ should obviously be interpreted as an ability to *accurately* imagine what it is like to Φ. Suppose that Eric, an American who has never tasted vegemite, is trying to imagine what it is like to eat vegemite based on things he has heard about this food spread. Unfortunately, Eric's information is very inaccurate (a result of Australian friends who enjoy giving him false information about things like vegemite and drop bears), and so he ends up imagining the experience of eating vegemite as an experience of eating a sweet food spread with a liquorice-like taste. Eric is, in a sense, imagining what it is like to eat vegemite, just very badly, and so he has an ability to imagine what it is like to eat vegemite. But he does not have an ability to *accurately* imagine what it is like to eat vegemite. This is obviously the kind of ability Lewis had in mind, for a mere ability to inaccurately imagine what it is like to eat vegemite is an ability that one can easily possess without ever having had an experience of eating vegemite.

The second, and more complicated, clarification to make is that this ability to accurately imagine what it is like to Φ cannot be interpreted as a mere ability to imagine that *p*, for some true proposition *p* about the way it feels to Φ. Suppose you travel to New Zealand and eat goody gumdrops ice-cream for the first time. Having had that great experience you will typically acquire a new ability to accurately imagine what it is like to eat goody gumdrops ice-cream. But that ability is a not a mere ability to just imagine *that*, say, the way it feels to eat goody gumdrops is similar in part to both the way it feels to eat ice-cream in general and the way it feels to taste bubble-gum. For that ability is one that you can possess before you had any experience of eating goody gumdrops ice-cream, whereas the former ability is one that, normally, you would possess only after having had such an experience. One might point out that there are also forms of propositional imagining that one couldn't engage in prior to having had that experience. So, after eating goody gumdrops one should now be able to imagine *that* the experience of eating goody gumdrops ice-cream is like *this*, where the demonstrative picks out some inner event of imagining the way it feels to eat that flavour of ice-cream again. But that kind of propositional imagining seems to presuppose, and rely upon, one's new ability to objectually imagine the way it feels to eat goody gumdrops itself.

These points suggest that the ability to accurately imagine what it is like to Φ condition should be interpreted in terms of the objectual, rather than the interrogative, interpretation of WIL-

expressions. The idea being that it is an ability to accurately imagine the experience of eating vegemite itself—or, equivalently, the way it feels to eat vegemite itself—rather than just imagine that it feels some way to Φ.

Related distinctions are made in the imagination literature between 'experiential' versus 'propositional' imaginings (see e.g., Debus 2016). Characterisations of this distinction vary but the idea is usually something like this: experiential imaginings involve experiential characteristics—like phenomenal properties or visual imagery—whereas propositional imaginings do not and are comparable to propositional beliefs and judgments. And this distinction is often connected with a linguistic distinction between imaginings ascriptions with objectual contents versus those with propositional contents, with experiential imaginings being ascribed by 'imagines X' or 'imaginings of X' ascriptions, and propositional imaginings being ascribed by 'imagines that' ascriptions.[7]

The objectual imagining involved in the ability to imagine condition is clearly experiential. Following Montero (2020) (whose views we will discuss in §3.2), I think the kind of imagining at issue here is what Descartes (1642) identified when he said that people "cannot think of their loathing for medicine without the same taste coming back to their minds" (p. 238). That is, an ability to accurately imagine, say, the experience of smelling coffee, is an ability to, in some sense, make that distinctive experience present to one's mind again. And it is this ability that you will typically lack with respect to the taste of good gumdrops ice cream, if you have not had the pleasure of having that experience. And when Eric imagines the experience of eating vegemite as an experience of eating a sweet food spread with a liquorice-like taste he is failing to bring the actual experience of eating vegemite to mind.

How to interpret this talk of 'bringing an experience to mind' is a difficult matter. I think the concept we need is that of cognitive modelling or simulation.[8] That is, we should understand the ability to accurately imagine the experience of Φ-ing in terms of an ability to have a mental event of imagining which itself possesses some of the same phenomenal properties shared by the target experience of Φ-ing. This is in line with Goldman's (2006) influential account of

[7] The distinction between experiential versus propositional imaginings is not a precise one, partly because of cases like the case mentioned earlier (imagining that *this* is the way that it feels to eat goody gumdrops) where a form of propositional imagining involves experiential and objectual imagining. See Bernecker (2010: 16) for related discussion about parallel distinctions made in the memory literature (distinctions we will discuss in §3.2).

[8] See Paul (2014, 2015b) for related ideas. So, for example, Paul (2015b: 476) writes: "Having that experience gives you new abilities to imagine, recognize, and cognitively model possible future experiences of that kind."

simulation according to which for one process *P* to simulate another process *P** is for *P* to duplicate, replicate, or resemble *P** in some significant respect, and also for *P* to thereby fulfill a function or purpose; where in our case that purpose would be to imagine the experience of Φ-ing and would be set by one's intention to do that. And it is at least partly in virtue of this sharing of phenomenal properties that this imagining represents the target experience of Φ-ing, and the accuracy of this form of imagining is at least partly a function of how many such properties it shares with that target experience.

3.2 Remembering

The ability to imagine condition should be understood in terms of an objectual, experiential, and simulative form of imagining rather than mere propositional imagining. Turning now to the ability to remember condition, I think we should interpret it in a very similar way.

This is because we can give reasons for favouring the objectual interpretation of the ability to remember condition that closely parallel those for favouring the objectual interpretation of the imagination condition. Suppose you eat vegemite for the first time and thereby acquire an ability to remember what it is like to eat vegemite. The next day you will be able to remember *that* the taste of vegemite is, say, salty and comparable to soy sauce. But, of course, that is something you could know and remember to be true solely on the basis of having been told about that resemblance, without ever having tasted vegemite yourself. So, this kind of 'remembering-that' ability is not a plausible interpretation of the new ability you gained when you ate vegemite for the first time. Rather, that new ability looks like it is an ability to remember the experience of eating vegemite itself.

And there are existing distinctions in discussions of memory that one might appeal to in analysing this form of objectual remembering that closely resemble the distinctions in the imagination literature between experiential versus propositional imaginings. So, in philosophy there are longstanding distinctions made between recollective versus factual memories, or experiential versus propositional memories (see Debus 2016 and Breckner 2010 for discussion of these distinctions and their similarities with the distinction between experiential versus propositional imaginings). And, in psychology, there are closely related distinctions made between episodic versus semantic memories (Tulving 1983). But, paralleling the earlier issues with the imagination condition, the mere notion of an experiential or episodic memory is not

going to be enough to characterise the kind of memory we need to appeal to in interpreting the ability to remember condition.

The more specific notion of memory we need, I think, is that which Montero (2020) has identified and labelled 'qualitative memory'. As Montero shows, the notions of episodic and qualitative memory can come apart, at least given standard characterisations of episodic memories whereby they involve a kind of "re-experiencing" of specific token events from one's personal past (Tulving 1983). Consider someone who has eaten vegemite, but it was several years ago. It might be that they can no longer bring that taste to mind, but they can experientially recall the visual episodes involved in a specific event of eating vegemite (so maybe they can see the dark spread on the butter knife as they scrape it across a slice of lightly toasted bread). But it is equally possible that the reverse is true, and this person cannot now recall any of specific events of their eating vegemite in the past, but they can still bring that distinctive taste back to mind. Or as Montero (2020) says about an auditory example: "Nor, thank goodness, do I need to remember my piano recital when I was ten in order to imagine the sound of Chopin's Prelude No. 7."

As that quote indicates, in characterising qualitative memory Montero often talks of *imagining* the qualities of experiences, like tastes, sounds, and flavours. The implicit idea, I take it, is that in making, say, the qualitative properties involved in an experience of eating vegemite present to one's mind, through one's imagining of those properties, one will thereby also remember those properties in the relevant sense. Montero does not discuss any possible distinction between qualitative memory and what we might call '*mere* qualitative imagining', which is understandable as the line between qualitative imagining and qualitative memories does seem very thin in many cases. Note, for example, that in that earlier quote from Descartes—which Montero appeals to characterising the notion of qualitative memories—he doesn't merely talk of people making a bad taste present to their mind, rather he speaks of the bad tasting "coming back to their minds" which is suggestive of not just objectually imagining the taste of the medicine but of also objectually remembering it.

Using the framework from §3.1, we can characterise the notion of qualitative memory in a way that acknowledges the tight relationship with qualitative imagining whilst also indicating where the difference between the two concepts will lie. Like the ability to imagine what it is like to Φ, the ability to remember what it is like to Φ will be a matter of having an ability to imagine the experience of Φ-ing where the mental event of imagining represents that experience in

virtue of possessing some of the same phenomenal properties shared by the target experience of Φ-ing. But the difference is that when one engages in this objectual and simulative imagining of the experience of Φ-ing one will also satisfy further conditions which will relate one in some appropriate way to one's own past experiences of Φ-ing.

Beyond the minimal requirement of having had that past experience, it will be a difficult matter, of course, to say what those further conditions are. But the theoretical options will be related to familiar ideas from more general debates about how to distinguish experiential memories from experiential imaginings.[9] And, even without an account of these further conditions, the past experience condition by itself should suffice to establish that there is a distinction to be made of some kind between qualitative memories and qualitative imaginings. This is because it is metaphysically possible that someone could possess the ability to accurately imagine the experience of Φ-ing without having had an experience of Φ-ing themselves, whereas the ability to remember the experience of Φ-ing obviously requires one to have actually had an experience of Φ-ing at some point in the past.[10] In which case, there will be scenarios where the former ability will be possessed but not the latter (we will return to this point in §4).

3.3 Recognition

What of the recognition ability? Again, I think this ability condition needs to be interpreted in terms of the objectual interpretation of WIL-expressions. So, for example, I had labyrinthitis once about ten years ago, which is an inflammation of the inner ear that causes a form of vertigo. It was an awful experience as it felt like the room was spinning around me. If I were to have this experience again, I am confident that I would recognise that I was experiencing labyrinthitis again, as the way the experience felt was so distinctive. But that is not all I would

[9] So, for example, one might appeal to any of the following ideas: (i) that when the imagining is also a form of remembering it will be causally dependent in the right way on one's past experience of Φ-ing (cf. Hopkins 2018), (ii) that a distinctive feelings of "pastness" or familiarity will accompany the imagining of the experience when it is a form of remembering (cf. Russell 1921), or (iii) that there will be differences in one's intentions (cf. Urmson 1967) when one is remembering versus merely imagining (e.g., intending to remember what it was like to taste vegemite yesterday versus intending to imagine what it would be like to taste it again tomorrow). For further discussion of these issues, and other relevant positions and references, see Debus (2016).

[10] There is a sense in which, even though I have never tasted durian, I still have an ability now to remember what is like to eat durian. For I do have an ability to form accurate memories of the experience of eating durian *in circumstances where I have had that experience*. But obviously that is not the kind of ability Lewis has in mind because experiences are clearly never required to possess those kinds of abilities. Rather, the kind of ability Lewis is pointing us to is something like an ability to form accurate memories of the experience of tasting durian *in my currently normal circumstances*, and I do not have that ability given that I have never tasted durian. The issues here relate to more general issues to do with the context sensitivity of ability ascriptions.

recognise. Someone who knew various facts about labyrinthitis symptoms, might well recognise *that* they are experiencing labyrinthitis despite never having had that experience before, simply by noting the accordance between what they are feeling and those facts. However, if I had labyrinthitis again, I would not merely recognise *that* I was experiencing labyrinthitis, rather I would also recognise the experience itself, that is, the way it feels to have labyrinthitis would strike me as being familiar and something I have encountered before.

Or suppose you go to a friend's place for dinner. As soon as you enter their apartment you recognise a distinctive cooking aroma, but you cannot yet name what the smell is. You might even say something like "I know that smell, but what is it?". After a moment you exclaim "ah, of course, it's nutmeg!". Up until that moment you recognised the experience you were having, but you did not yet recognise *that* the experience you were having was an experience of smelling nutmeg. Of course, you could, before that moment, recognise that *this* is an experience I have had before. But this 'recognising-that' would seem to presuppose your prior objectual recognition of the experience itself. That is, recognising the way it feels to smell nutmeg does not look to be a matter of simply having that experience and then finding oneself judging that one has had such an experience before, rather that judgment is based on the familiarity of the experience itself.

4. Priority Questions

Having clarified the interpretation of Lewis' ability conditions we can now to turn to questions about their relative importance. Are these abilities all on an equal footing? For example, are they all individually necessary conditions for retaining WIL-knowledge over time? And are any of these conditions individually sufficient for possessing WIL-knowledge, or are they only jointly sufficient conditions? These are the kinds of questions I want to explore in closing, and this will also help us to unpack the issue of fleeting WIL-knowledge.

Now when we consider interrogative WIL-knowledge I think even the possession of all three abilities will not be sufficient for possessing this propositional knowledge. This is because interrogative WIL-knowledge is a form of propositional knowledge, so retaining it will also be a matter of having a further ability or disposition to make relevant propositional judgements when exercising those abilities. Suppose Eric eats vegemite for the first time, and thereby acquire abilities to objectually imagine, remember, and recognise the way it feels to eat vegemite. The retention of these abilities alone is plausibly sufficient for Eric to continue to

count as objectually knowing what it is like to eat vegemite. But when it comes to interrogative WIL-knowledge Eric also needs to possess an ability or disposition to have occurrent beliefs or judgments whose content is a true propositional answer to the WIL-question. So, when Eric objectually imagines or remembers the way it feels to eat vegemite, he will also be disposed to judge *that* this is the way it feels to eat vegemite, and if he eats vegemite and thereby recognises the taste of vegemite again, he will be disposed to recognise *that* this is the way it feels to eat vegemite.

Putting that qualification to one side, and turning back to the ability conditions, the first point to note is that our discussion in §3.2 suggests there is a sense in which the ability to imagine condition is more fundamental than the ability to remember condition. This is because the ability to remember condition was partly analysed in terms of the ability to imagine condition. Relatedly, we noted that there should be possible scenarios where someone satisfies the ability to imagine what it is like to Φ condition but not the ability to remember what it is like to Φ condition. Furthermore, there are also reasons to think that someone in such a scenario would still know what it is like to Φ, from which it would follow that the ability to remember condition is not a necessary condition for possessing such knowledge. And there cannot be cases with the reverse structure (i.e., where the ability to remember condition is retained but not the ability to imagine condition) given that the ability to remember is partly analysed in terms of (and, hence, entails) the ability to imagine.

To support those claims, it will be useful to consider Lewis' (1990) reasons for maintaining that while experience is "the best teacher" when it comes to gaining WIL-knowledge, and even "the only practical way" of gaining that knowledge, it is not the only possible way of gaining WIL-knowledge. Lewis (1990: 448) notes that when someone has a new experience, and thereby comes to know what it is like to Φ in the normal way, this will make some change in their physical states. But it is metaphysically possible that a person who has never had an experience of Φ-ing could nonetheless be put into the exact same physical states through some non-normal cause, like advanced neuroscience of the future or magic. And Lewis thinks that, in such a scenario, the subject would thereby come to possess that same knowledge of what it is like to Φ despite never having Φ-ed themselves.

But note that even if we granted that a person in such a scenario would have the abilities to imagine and recognise, they would *not* have the ability to *remember* the experience of Φ-ing

as one can possess that ability only if one has had an experience of Φ-ing to remember.[11] Rather, they could only have an ability to form *apparent* memories of this kind. So, if Lewis is right that such a person would still know what it is like to Φ, then the ability to remember condition is not a necessary condition for knowing what it is like to Φ.

Perhaps the lesson here is that we should follow Nemirow's (1990) version of the ability hypothesis and state the retention hypothesis solely in terms of the ability to imagine condition? I think not because I take it that both of the following claims are plausible: (i) there are possible scenarios where someone possesses the ability to recognise the experience of Φ-ing whilst lacking the abilities to imagine or remember the experience of Φ-ing; and, (ii) in many of these scenarios the subject still knows what it is like to Φ. And if both (i) and (ii) are true then the ability to recognise condition looks to be an independent and individually sufficient condition for possessing WIL-knowledge.

The claim made by (i) looks to be well supported by everyday cases. One might, for example, be unable to objectually imagine or remember the way it feels to hear the theme song from the Electric Company, having not seen that TV show for decades. But still if one were to hear that song again one would instantly recognise that song and the experience of hearing it. Or someone might struggle to imagine or remember the way it feels to smell nutmeg, but still be able to recognise that experience, when they have it again. So, assuming (i) is true, what should we say about (ii)?

This question is related to the issue of whether some WIL-knowledge is 'fleeting' in the sense that you can only possess it when having the relevant experiences, or perhaps for just a short time afterwards. As noted in §1, Montero (2020: 104) thinks that pain experiences are experiences such that you cannot remember what they are like after the experience has ended:

> [Y]ou can't imagine the qualitative component of their presence. You may, of course, remember certain things about the pain— that it came on suddenly and increased in intensity, for example — but what it felt like, I venture, is not among them.

And Montero suggests that hunger and temperature experiences may also be like this. So, Montero takes these to all be cases where someone who is not currently having these experiences will lack the abilities to objectually imagine and remember what it is like to have

[11] Note that the earlier qualification in fn. 10 applies again here.

these experiences, even when they have had these experiences many times in the past. However, Montero acknowledges that in these cases one will often still possess the ability to recognise the relevant experience. So, Montero (2020: 112) accepts (i) but she also seems to clearly reject (ii):

> We do, however, seem to be able to recognize a repeated pain. Do such recognitional abilities suggest that the qualitative component of the pain is nonetheless stored in our memories? Of course, if we are able to only recognize yet not recall pain's fundamental ouchyness, we would still not know what it is like to be in pain (unless we were in pain).

In this passage Montero assumes that if a person was only able to recognize, but not imaginatively recall, the way it feels to have a certain kind of pain experience then, when not experiencing that pain, they would not count as knowing what it is like to experience it. In which case, if we also agree with Montero's assumption that we lack the ability to imagine and remember pain experiences, then knowing what it is like to feel a certain kind of pain is an example of fleeting WIL-knowledge.

But that first assumption (which is not as important for Montero's overall position) looks to be very contestable, especially when we generalize the idea to other cases. So, suppose Montero's is right that when we are not currently hungry that we can't imagine or recall the way it feels to be hungry. Would it follow that someone who is not currently hungry, does not know what it is like to be hungry, even though they have felt that sensation many times in the past and will recognize it when they feel it again in the future? Or consider a sighted person with aphantasia who cannot form good visual images in their imagination of the faces of people they know, but they still recognize those faces when they see them again.[12] Doesn't such a person still count as knowing what it is like to see the face of their mother even when they are not currently looking at their mother? After all, they will not be surprised by the character of their experience when they see their mother again.

I suspect part of what is going on here is that our judgments about such cases will vary depending on whether we emphasize the importance of imaginative/recollective abilities (as

[12] People with aphantasia tend to have some deficits in their object recognition abilities, but any links between prosopagnosia and aphantasia do not appear to be that strong (see Monzel et al. 2023) and the kind of case described above certainly looks to be possible.

Montero does), or instead the importance of recognitional abilities (as I have just done above).[13] More generally, I doubt that any one of Lewis' three abilities can be considered as a necessary condition for the truth of knowing-WIL ascriptions in all contexts. Following Schwitzgebel (2013) it is plausible that any propositional attitude state—and I suspect the same is true for objectual attitudes—will be associated with a large cluster of stereotypical properties, where we ascribe that attitude based on whether someone possesses a sufficient number of those properties, and where exactly how many and what kinds of those properties are required for us to make those ascriptions will vary across different contexts depending on changes in our interests and values. And if that kind of picture is correct then it would make sense that, in some contexts, we would judge that someone knows what it is like to Φ even though they only possess the recognition ability. In which case, if we are to find clearer case of 'fleeting' WIL-knowledge we would want to look for examples where, arguably, a subject lacks all three of Lewis' abilities after the experience has ended.[14]I think Lewis' big contribution is that he identified three properties—that is, the properties of possessing the abilities to imagine, remember, and recognize—that are central to the cluster of properties that we stereotypically associate with the possession of WIL-knowledge.And that claim is consistent with saying that no one of these abilities is necessary for retaining WIL-knowledge and that there may be contexts where we would ascribe WIL-knowledge to someone who only possesses just one of these abilities. Furthermore, these points are also consistent with the idea that one of these ability conditions is more central to this set of stereotypical properties than the other two ability conditions. And I think there is a lot that can be said for viewing the ability to imagine condition as having this status.

For one thing, as discussed, it is plausible that the ability to imagine condition is more fundamental than the ability to remember condition. And while there might be some situations where we would judge that someone knows what it is like to Φ despite only possessing the recognition ability, there are ways in which the epistemic state of someone who merely possessed the ability to recognise would be notably less valuable than the epistemic state of

[13] Another complicating factor here is that the abilities to imagine, remember, and recognize likely come in different strengths or degrees (Lee forthcoming). For example, if we think of the abilities to imagine and remember, the degree to which the objectual imagining of the relevant experience simulates the target experience will clearly be a matter of degree, as the imagining will clearly not share all the same phenomenal properties as its target (after all, imagining the experience of swallowing the bad tasting medicine is not as bad as actually having that experience again).

[14] Tye's (2000) case of knowing what it is like to look at a very determinate shade of red might be thought to be an example of this kind.

someone who only possessed the ability to imagine. For note that the person with just the imagination ability can manifest their WIL-knowledge even when they are not currently having an experience of Φ-ing, and they can do so at will, whereas the person who only has the recognition ability can only manifest their WIL-knowledge in circumstances where they have the experience of Φ-ing again, which might be a matter over which they have little or no control. Relatedly, the ability to imagine condition can help us to make judgements about the experience of Φ-ing, and decisions concerning such experiences (e.g., reimagining an experience might help one to decide whether one wants to have that experience again), even when we are not currently able to have such experiences. In other words, the ability to imagine condition underpins the key ways that we can manifest and exercise our knowledge of what it is like to Φ *between* our experiences of Φ-ing.

More could be said on these matters, but I think these features of the ability to imagine condition, suggest that it might play a more central role in how we think about and ascribe WIL-knowledge than the ability to remember and recognise conditions. And this in turn might help to explain the appeal of the idea (following Nemirow) that we can analyse WIL-knowledge solely in terms of the imagination ability, and the idea (following Montero) that one cannot know what it is like to have an experience if one can only recognise but not imagine such experiences, even if these ideas are not strictly correct.

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