

# On Knowing-How and Ability

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The locution “know how” as it occurs in knowledge ascriptions of the form “ $S$  knows how to  $\phi$ ” can be used in two different ways. There is a possible use in which “knowing how” seems to entail “being able” – an *ability-entailing* use –, and another possible use in which “knowing how” does not seem to entail “being able” – an *ability-neutral* use. This is a fact about knowing-how *ascriptions*, a *linguistic* fact then. The present paper offers an *epistemological* account for that fact, an account that ultimately contrasts with the reductivist view, held by Stanley & Williamson, for instance, that knowing-how simply is a species of knowing-that.

The main lines of the account I have in mind can be formulated as follows. There are two distinct kinds of knowledge which “know how” can be used to talk about: a *theoretical* kind, and a *practical* kind. There are also two distinct kinds of ability that a subject can have when it comes to performing a certain task: an *extrinsic* kind, and an *intrinsic* kind. The following conditional:

A subject  $S$  knows how to perform a task  $\phi$  only if  $S$  is able to  $\phi$

does hold, but for and only for one of the two kinds of knowledge – the practical – and one of the two kinds of ability – the intrinsic. In other words, it is because there is an ability-like kind of knowledge that an ability-entailing reading of “know how” is available. The primary purpose of the paper, then, will be to clarify the appropriate notions of ability and knowledge that will allow for an explanation of that sort.

To this end, building on the fundamental notion of a *procedure*, the first part of the paper introduces the two aforementioned distinctions which form the basis of the view I propose regarding knowing-how and ability. The distinctions will then be put to use in the second part, dedicated to highlighting some of the theoretical benefits which I think can be gained from endorsing the proposed view. More

precisely, the benefits I shall highlight are that it provides interesting insights into (1) the connection between knowing-how and intentional action, (2) that between comparative knowing-how attributions and ability, (3) the question of the Gettierability of knowing-how, (4) the opacity of knowing-how ascriptions, (5) the idea of semantic knowledge as practical knowledge, and (6) it allows us to explain away possible counterexamples to the view that to know how is to have an ability.

### **Indicative bibliography**

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