Know-How: Certainty, Mastery or Both?

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The majority of philosophy conducted, and published, in the field of epistemology presumes that knowledge is one and the same as propositional knowledge. What is it for S to know that *p*? How is knowledge of *p* justified or reliably produced? What is the difference between true belief and knowledge, and why might the latter be more valuable than the former? Acknowledgement that there may be more types of knowledge, such as know-*how*, ability knowledge, or acquaintance knowledge, tends to be, at best, cursory. This *propositional presumption*, as I shall call it, is one of the main shapers of the predominantly intellectualist climate that informs most current epistemological practice. It is a presumption, however, that is coming under threat. For in the last decade, or so, there has been a resurgence in the debate amongst contemporary epistemologists, along with philosophers of mind and action, about the nature of, and relation between, propositional knowledge and know-how. Is our knowledge-*that* one type of knowledge, whilst our know-*how* another? Or is there only one type of knowledge, after all? Perhaps our knowledge-*that* is just some kind of know-*how*, or, conversely, our know-*how* is some species of, or is subsumable, in some way, under our knowledge-*that*.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein's own grammatical investigations suggest quite a different way of engaging in this know-that/know-how debate, one that continues to pressurise this propositional presumption. OC 204:

> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but – the end is not propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.

According to Daniele Moyal-Sharrock's Third Wittgenstein reading of *On Certainty,* these foundational ways of acting are a kind of non-propositional, non-intellectual *know-how*. This Wittgensteinian conception of know-how has, however, played no role, to date, in any of this ongoing exploration of the relation between knowing-how and knowing-that. In this paper, I aim to motivate this option of bringing a Wittgensteinian perspective to bear on the question. I start with a quick sketch of the current debate.

There are three basic positions around which recent discussion revolves.
The first position takes its core commitment from Gilbert Ryle's original 1940s attack on the so-called Intellectualist Legend. This position, a distinctness thesis, holds that there are two separate, mutually irreducible kinds of knowledge: our propositional knowledge or knowledge-*that*, and some kind of non-propositional ability knowledge or know-*how*. The second position holds there is only one kind of knowledge; propositional knowledge, which is known under different modes of presentation: including, but not limited to, demonstrative and practical modes. This is the claim Jason Stanley & Timothy Williamson make in their debate-igniting paper of 2001. In this, they directly attack Ryle's distinctness thesis, arguing for their own self-professed intellectualist view that our know-*how* is just a species of know-*that*, albeit known under a practical mode of presentation. The third position is that recently staked out by Stephen Hetherington with his 'knowledge-as-ability'

hypothesis. He, too, takes a reductionist, one-knowledge view, but runs the reduction in the opposite direction; claiming all our knowledge-*that* is 'knowledge how to perform various actions' (2006: 72). There is a new, fourth position that (forthcoming in 2011) which I will characterise later.

This debate tends to be conducted with the help of a fairly narrow range of activities which are taken, uncontroversially, to be examples of know-how: riding a bicycle, playing chess, fishing, cooking and skating, and the like … Stanley & Williamson's own expositional preference is for Hannah and her bike-riding knowledge. Hannah's knowledge how to ride a bicycle, is, they claim, nothing other than her knowledge that *w* is a way to ride a bicycle, known under a practical mode of presentation.
This circumspect selection of particular activities and abilities tends to be the focus of the debate, and only rarely do any of these main positions explore their commitments by directly engaging other, broader fields of knowledge, such as religious, mathematical, moral or semantic knowledge.

What happens, though, when the debate is taken into, for example, semantic knowledge? We talk about *knowing* a language, say, English, *knowing how to speak* English, *understanding* English, *being able to* speak English. These familiar locutions suggest that semantic knowledge offers an illuminating arena for continued exploration of the know-how/know-that debate. Yet the *modus operandi* of the epistemology of language, firmly mired in its truth-conditional theories of meaning and semantic-theoretic approaches, takes the propositional presumption as a pre-requisite. Jason Stanley's own view that "semantic competence amounts to grasp of a compositional semantic theory for that language." (2005: 136) fits entirely comfortably with his claim that knowledge how to speak a language is just propositional knowledge known under a practical mode of presentation. On those rare occasions when our linguistic know-how, understanding or abilities are tabled, (eg. Hornsby 2005) they are either immediately dismissed or succumb to Dummett's intellectualist orientation. He claims that what a speaker knows when he knows a language is 'practical knowledge, knowledge how to speak the language: but", he continues, "this is no objection to its representation as propositional knowledge; mastery of a procedure, of a conventional practice can always be so represented." (1976: 36)

I suggest this points to the likelihood that were the propositional presumption to be undermined, with regard to activities of the *huntin', shootin',* and *fishin'* variety, there is such a fundamental commitment to the propositional presumption of our *semantic* knowledge, that this whole area may well remain invulnerable, behind its own *cordon sanitaire*. Given the rich and pertinent resources on offer from Wittgenstein in this field, I would like to argue that it makes strategic sense to focus anti-intellectual challenges directly on this intellectualist stronghold.

The Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Grammar* is already exploring the idea that, "What a word means a proposition cannot tell". (PG: 208) The propositional presumption is already being threatened by an entirely different approach to knowledge and meaning: "'I can use the

word 'yellow" is like 'I know how to move the king in chess.' "(PG 49) This involves an appreciation of the deeply integrated nature of the semantic, the practical and epistemic dimensions of our linguistic abilities: "Understanding a word may mean: knowing how it is used; being able to apply it." (PG 47).

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein prepares the reader for the discussions about 'knowing how to go on' when one continues a series correctly (PI 151) by reminding us that there is a set of relevant family resemblance terms which are all intimately related: "The grammar of the word "know" is evidentially closely related to the grammar of the words "can", "is able to". But also closely related to that of the word "understand". (To have 'mastered' a technique.) (P1 150)

In *On Certainty*, the text rings throughout with the resonances of Wittgenstein's *cri de coeur,* taken from Goethe: "In the beginning was the deed." (OC 402) The propositional presumption is shown to harbour a profound misunderstanding about the extent to which those propositions that look like empirical propositions, need actually *be* empirical propositions, or indeed *propositions* at all. These insights undercut theories such as Stanley's semantic-theoretic account, which harvest their epistemological pickings from the shared syntactical forms of sentence.

Such is the very briefest of glimpses of just a tiny part of the vast array of different points of contact and entry which Wittgenstein's work offers the know-how/know-that debate. In this short paper, I will limit myself to taking a closer look at just one of those points: the nature of hinge certainty in *On Certainty*. On the one hand, *On Certainty* looks to confirm the different categorial status of knowledge and certainty (OC 308), yet on the other hand, if we are to understand our hinge certainty as a kind of know-how, we might see this categorial difference as highlighting *not* the distinction between our know-how and an undiscriminated knowledge, but rather the distinction between our know-how and, more specifically, our propositional knowledge.

In the Third Wittgenstein reading of *On Certainty,* proposed by Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, she articulates Wittgenstein's distinction between empirical propositions and those hinge 'propositions' such as 'Red is a colour', 'There are objects in the world', as, actually, a distinction between propositions and non-propositions, ie. between propositions with truth-values and hinges certainties. These hinges certainties are enacted or shown in our ways of acting, in our thoughtless ways of taking-hold, in our animal attitude to, and ways of being-in, our world. In the activities of collecting books, picking up towels, closing doors, selecting red apples from green, etc. Such certainty is manifest in our human nature, in our form of life. It is, "ensured by nurture and furthered by culture". (2004: 6) Furthermore, this hinge certainty, is a kind of a kind of basic belief. Not, however, a propositional belief-*that*, but a *hinge* belief; neither propositional nor intellectual: not belief-*that*, but rather belief-*in*. Such belief-*in* is a basic, foundational, un-evaluative because unreasoned, trust. It is our foundational ways of acting, our non-propositional certainty; our non-propositional, non-intellectual *know-how*.

In contrast, Peter Hacker's reading keeps to a propositional view of (some of) these hinge certainties, choosing instead to articulate what he takes to be Wittgenstein's enriched notion of propositions. He holds that though our *grammatical propositions* are no longer bipolar propositions they can, none the less, be *a priori* necessary truths. Bipolarity gives way to bivalence, but the proposition pre-

sumption is maintained. What it is to know a necessary truth, such as say, 'Red is a colour' is not to have some kind of propositional knowledge, in the way that one has when knows a true empirical proposition or description, but rather it is to know a *norm* of description, or a rule. But to know a norm of description, or a rule, is, of course, as Hacker is the first to agree, is to master a technique: to know-*how* to do something.

So Hacker arrives at know-how via propositional, bivalent grammatical propositions, and *mastery*; whilst Moyal-Sharrock arrives at know-how via non-propositional beliefs-in, foundational ways of acting, and *certainty*. Though the range of propositions Hacker takes to be grammatical norms and rules, are not a direct match with Moyal-Sharrock's hinges, both agree on the enabling or framework role, of the *grammatical propositions* of our language (Hacker), or our particular *linguistic hinges* (Moyal-Sharrock.) So there is a consensus between both the Second and Third Wittgenstein readings that what we know, when we know a language, is, *contra* Dummett, Stanley and the rest of those intellectualists in the grip of the propositional presumption, a type of know-*how*.

But yet, according to the Third Wittgenstein reading, this know-how is not epistemic. The very anti-intellectualist, non-propositionality of hinges and their failure to have any truth-value, entails that this know-how of our hinge certainty is, supposedly, non-epistemic. Eschewing any epistemic status for this Wittgensteinian know-how, is, I want to argue, a mistake: one that indicates the extent to which the propositional presumption controls the conceptual space in which the current know-how debate occurs. For it is indicative of the power of the propositional presumption to insist that only that which aims at truth is and can be epistemic. But whilst the debate about what types of knowledge there are and how they are related to each other, is still ongoing, is it not pre-emptive to so limit the applicability of this notion? If what is, or is not epistemic, is guided, instead, by what is and isn't *knowledge*-pertinent or related, rather than simply *truth*-pertinent, then one need not rule in a favour of the propositional presumption, whilst the jury's still out. Claiming epistemic status for Wittgensteinian know-how also makes sense, if one considers Hacker's alternative reading of linguistic grammatical propositions. For even the most hard core propositional intellectualist would, I imagine, be loathe to deny epistemic status to *a priori* necessary truths. By either account, then, I suggest there are good reasons to claim that Wittgensteinian know-how should be considered part of the epistemic family. I also suggest that this is not just a matter of nomenclature, but is important in paving the way for encouraging Wittgensteinian insights and resources to enter this more mainstream debate. Something most devoutly to be wished.

I would like to finish by offering the briefest of introductions to a new intellectualist account of knowing-how, which is due to appear next summer in the first-ever anthology of articles about knowing-how. This is the proposal by the collection's editors, John Bengson & Marc Moffett, who attempt to provide what they call a non-propositional intellectualist account, thus supposedly cutting across traditional lines of thought on the subject.

On this view, to know-how to φ, is understand how to φ. To understand how to φ, is to be in 'a cognitive state, distinct from propositional knowledge, which can guide action'. Such a cognitive state is one which 'grasp[s] a correct and complete conception of a way of φ-ing'. (B&M forthcoming). Bengson & Moffett eschew, however, a role for ability, claiming that ability is neither necessary nor

sufficient for know-how. They simultanesouly provide an account which helps itself to the notions of understanding, grasping, cognising, concept-mastery, and being in informational states, whilst all the while insisting their account is firmly non-propositional. If one considers the impact of their view on semantic knowledge, not something they have yet done, it would appear that according to Bengson & Moffett it is possible that one know-how to speak a language, without actually being able to. From this view it is but a short hop to Chomsky's Theory of Competence, "If … to know a language is to be in a certain mental state comprised of a structure of rules and principles … then in theory one could know a language without having the capacity to use it." (1980: 51). Our acting and our activities are the baby that is thrown out with this latest intellectualist bath water. Perhaps this is inevitable when epistemology is hi-jacked by the philosophy of mind, knowledge is usurped by cognition and instead of elucidating epistemology, it gets naturalised.

I hope this brief glimpse at the increasingly befuddled know-how debate confirms that the time has come to bring a Wittgensteinian approach to the matter.

Literature

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