

## Intellectualism, Competence, and Knowledge

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It is a curious fact about the current debate over intellectualism that it has come to be viewed as a debate about the relation of knowledge-how to knowledge-that, more specifically as a debate that can be adjudicated by appeal to the linguistics of 'knows how', or more broadly 'knows *wh*' constructions. This is surprising inasmuch intellectualism, at least as Ryle (1949) famously formulated the view,<sup>1</sup> was not a claim about the relation of knowledge-how and knowledge-that, much less a claim about the linguistics of 'knows' constructions, even if Ryle did present his arguments against intellectualism in a chapter entitled 'Knowing How and Knowing That'. One might have supposed, as Fodor (1968) clearly does, that intellectualism is a substantive empirical thesis about the mental causation of behavior and as such not one that can be adjudicated by appeal to the linguistics of 'knows' constructions.

My aim in this paper is to take seriously Ryle's original formulation of intellectualism, asking (i) just what sort of thesis intellectualism is, and (ii) just how, if at all, linguistic evidence regarding 'knows' constructions bear on this thesis. I argue that intellectualism is indeed an empirical thesis about the causation of behavior and as such linguistic evidence regarding 'knows' construction cannot bear directly on the thesis (except under certain highly implausible methodological assumptions). Linguistic evidence, I argue, is relevant only insofar as intellectualism entails a view about human competence for certain intentional behaviors and knowledge ascriptions using 'knows' constructions turn out to be our culture's preferred way of talking about such competences in abstraction from practical

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<sup>1</sup> As Ryle (1949) formulates it, intellectualism holds that 'whenever an agent does anything intelligently, his act is preceded and steered by another internal act of considering a regulative proposition appropriate to his practical problem' (21).

abilities. One important upshot of these considerations, I argue, is that at least as the folk use the term 'knows', there is no sharp divide, as many philosophers have supposed, between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, a supposition that has encouraged the debate over whether one is (is not) reducible to the other. I argue that commonsense knowledge ascriptions are best understood if we think of knowledge-how and knowledge-that as ideal types lying at two ends of a continuum, the knowledge-that end of this continuum emphasizing information possession, the knowledge-how end of this continuum emphasizing possession of a cognitive competence for the behavior in question.<sup>2</sup> I defend this 'continuum view' by considering various 'knows NP' constructions (e.g., a good auto mechanic being said to 'know cars') which until now have not received attention in the literature but which seem to occupy something of a middle ground between the more family cases of knowledge-that and knowledge-how. I argue that the various things we know how to do occupy a much broader expanse along this continuum than the standard examples that have preoccupied philosophical discussions might lead us to suppose. I argue that the proposed continuum view can also make better sense both of cross-language data regarding the translation of 'knows' constructions into other language and of degree-modification in connection with certain 'knows' constructions (e.g., 'John knows better than me how to tie a bowline', 'I knows Kent better than I know Steve').

References:

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<sup>2</sup> Brogaard (2009) and Stalnaker (2012) have urged what I take to be somewhat similar views.

