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Knowing How, Basic Actions, and Ways of Doing Things

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether we can know how to do basic actions, from the perspective according to which knowing how to do something requires knowledge of a way to do it. A key argument from this perspective against basic know-how is examined and is found to be unsound, involving the false premise that there are no ways of doing basic actions. However, a new argument along similar lines is then developed, which contends that there are no ways of doing basic actions in any sense that matters for acquiring knowledge-how. This requires coming to a deeper understanding of ways of doing things than has hitherto been sought, which should be useful for further theorizing in this area. It is concluded that analyses of knowing-how in terms of knowledge of ways are inconsistent with the common assumption that there is basic know-how.

1. Introduction

An idea that is widely thought to be of importance for understanding knowing how to do something or ‘knowledge-how’ is that of a way of doing something. There are different views about how this idea relates to knowledge-how, but a way of stating it that might be vague enough to be acceptable to everyone is the following:

- (1) If one knows how to do an action, then one has knowledge of (or about or concerning) a way of doing it.

Perhaps part of the reasoning that makes this seem so plausible is the following. If something, *V*, can be done at all, then there must be at least one way to do it (if there is *no* way to do something, then it simply *cannot be done*). Suppose that there is just one way to do *V*. In that case, anyone who wants to do *V* must do it in this way. But then, in parallel fashion, anyone who wants to *know* how to do *V* must *know* of this way to do it.

We can then distinguish between two main ways of further developing this thought, an intellectualist and an objectualist way. According to the intellectualist, what (1) is saying

is that if one knows how to do an action, then one *knows that doing such-and-such is a way* of doing it (e.g., Bengson et al 2009, 399; Snowdon 2004, 26; Stanley and Williamson 2001, 430; Ware 1973, 157). So on this view knowledge-how is a kind of factual or propositional knowledge, with the way being specified by a verb or verb-phrase in the proposition, and most accounts of knowledge-how employing the idea of ways take this form. The other option is objectualism, recently defended by Bengson and Moffett (2011). On this view, what (1) is saying is that if one knows how to do an action, then one *knows a way* to do it, where that is not reducible to factual knowledge, though it can be ‘grounded on’ factual knowledge (Ibid., 188). Here knowledge-how is a kind of acquaintance knowledge, with the way being the object of acquaintance.¹

In this paper I will assume an intellectualist interpretation of proposition (1), partly because the argument I wish to examine and develop is advanced by philosophers who subscribe to this view and is more easily presented in those terms, and partly because I find it more satisfactory.² So the assumption of interest here is that knowing how to *V* requires knowing that some way, *W*, is a way to *V*. We should note, however, that when some *S* knows that *W* is a way to *V*, it is common for people, intellectualists included, to express this fact by simply saying that *S* knows a way to *V*, though for the intellectualist this latter mode of expression doesn’t represent the true logical form of the fact. Rather, it is just a convenient way of expressing the former fact without having to specify the ‘*W*’ (which we might be unable or unwilling to do).³ Some quotations in this paper will show intellectualists making use of this convenience, but this should not be seen as an endorsement of objectualism.

Given how popular (at least with intellectualists) and plausible (1) is, it would be worthwhile drawing out its implications—which is part of the process of evaluating it—and here we will be interested in its implications for whether it is possible to know how to do a

¹ Another option is to understand having knowledge of a way to *V* as knowing what some way to *V* is, which would make it a kind of knowledge-*wh*. However, since the standard view about knowledge-*wh* is that it is reducible to knowledge-that (Parent 2014), this would probably return us to intellectualism.

² For one thing, acquaintance with a way does not seem sufficient for knowledge-how. One can be acquainted with (because one observed or did oneself) an action *A* that is, in fact, the way to *V*, while having all the relevant concepts, such as of *A*-ing and of *V*-ing (see Bengson and Moffett 2011, 185-186). But one could still have no clue how to *V* because one does not know *that A* is the way to *V*. One could be ignorant of the *connection* between the action and *V*-ing.

³ It is worthwhile quoting Snowdon in this regard, who speaks of ‘two very simple equivalences’: ‘(i) if *S* knows how to *F*, then *S* knows a way to *F*, and (ii) if *S* knows a way to *F*, then *S* knows that so and so-ing is a way to *F*’ (2011, 59; also see Brown 1970, 240).

certain class of actions. This is the class of the simplest and most rudimentary things we can do, things we can do ‘immediately’ or ‘not by doing anything else’: so-called ‘basic actions’ (this notion will be clarified further as we go along). Paradigm cases include raising your arm, sticking your tongue out, blinking, or turning your head, and also certain mental actions like thinking of or imagining something. So the question of interest here, which we may call Q, is the following:

Q: Is there such a thing as knowing how to do a basic action?

Q has not received sustained discussion in the literature, and the little bit it has received has often been confined to footnotes. This lack of discussion seems due to a prevailing confidence that the answer to it is yes and that any claim to the contrary is highly implausible. Kieran Setiya, for instance, writes that it ‘is occasionally denied that we know how to perform basic actions ... I find the claim incredible ...’ (2012, 287, note 4). However, the position taken here is that proposition (1) raises doubts about whether this popular answer to Q is the correct one. And as we will soon see, some advocates of (1) have taken it to imply that the answer to Q is no, though other advocates disagree.

But what is at stake with Q? At least since Ryle (1949/2009, 18) exercises of knowing-how have been commonly understood as *intelligent performances*, so knowing-how has been regarded as a manifestation of intelligence. Similarly, the idea has been endorsed more recently that knowing-how is a *cognitive achievement* (Bengson and Moffett 2011; Carter and Pritchard 2015)⁴. However, these plausible assumptions—endorsed by intellectualists and anti-intellectualists alike—do not fit comfortably with the idea that there can be knowing-how with these basic actions. Stock examples of basic actions such as moving one’s arm or blinking are difficult to regard as manifesting intelligence or as cognitive achievements. For one thing, we share these abilities with animals. More importantly, they are abilities that, with some exceptions like ear-wiggling (Martin 1972, 60-61), we acquire without any learning, practicing, training, understanding, experimenting, figuring out, and with scarcely any thinking being needed, and they require no skill. They are, as Danto described them, unearned biological ‘gifts’ (1965, 146; note that according to some

⁴ These authors could be referring to the state of knowing how to do something as a cognitive achievement or to particular exercises of it as cognitive achievements. I assume that they would regard both as cognitive achievements.

action theorists, actions that token *learned* abilities, like tying our shoelaces, can also be basic in certain cases. I ask the reader to understand by ‘basic actions’ actions of the more rudimentary kind illustrated above. We will come back to these other sorts of action in the final section). So if such actions manifest knowledge-how, we will either have to reject the assumption that knowledge-how is essentially a manifestation of intelligence and/or cognition, or reconceive of intelligence and/or cognition to accommodate these cases. Both would be significant theoretical developments.⁵

In this paper we will examine an argument proposed by two philosophers that concludes from proposition (1) that there is no such thing as knowing how to do basic actions. Though we will see that this argument fails, I will argue that it is going in the right direction, and that with modifications it can be made to succeed. Developing this modified argument will require coming to a deeper understanding of the idea of a way of doing something, which should be useful for the further development of a theory of knowledge-how in terms of knowledge of ways. The end result will be to have shown that two popular assumptions are inconsistent with each other, assumption (1), and the assumption that there is basic know-how. It will be shown that *if* we accept (1) we should reject the idea of basic know-how. But it will largely be left to the reader to decide which assumption should be abandoned.

2. An argument against the possibility of knowing how to do basic actions

Before I present the original version of the argument against basic know-how, some initial clarificatory remarks on the idea of a basic action should be given. The idea of basic action in use here, where by ‘action’ I mean an intentional token action, accords with Blackburn’s formulation in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*: ‘The idea of a basic action is of that which I just do, but not by doing anything else’ (2005, 35; also see Sandis 2010, 12; Stout 2005, 138. For an overview of the topic, see Amaya 2017). The ‘by’ in this sentence can be understood as being short for ‘by means of’ and as the converse of ‘(in order) to’ (see Lavin 2016, p. 621; 2013, 275). That is, in the sense of ‘by’ in question here, if I intentionally *V* by *U*-ing, I *U* to *V*. (The ‘intentionally’ is important here; if I unintentionally roused the cat by turning on the light, I didn’t turn on the light to rouse the cat. But if I intentionally roused the cat by turning on the light, I turned on the light to rouse the cat.) To illustrate this idea, one

⁵ There are also some debates in which the assumption that there is basic know-how is doing important work, for instance in the Ability Hypothesis response to the Knowledge Argument against physicalism. See Snowdon (2004, 25) for further details.

may get rid of a fly by (means of) waving one's hand / wave one's hand (in order) to get rid of a fly, which means that getting rid of the fly was not a basic action.⁶ But if waving one's hand was not something one did by doing some other thing, it would be a basic action. Other definitions of basic action have been given (and abandoned) in the literature, and other senses of basicness have been distinguished, such as causal, preparatory, and compositional basicness (Hornsby 1980, 68). However, the above definition of basicness is crucial for our purposes, since it informs one of the premises in the argument that we will soon examine.

It is not clear that this definition succeeds in circumscribing a class of actions that we would properly regard as simple or rudimentary, and we will come across one such difficulty for it later. What is more important for now is that there be *some* actions that satisfy this definition, but even this has been denied (Lavin 2013; Thompson 2008, 107-108). This denial usually starts from the observation that any putative basic action will progress over time and will be divisible. Consider my waving my hand to frighten the fly for instance. To move my hand to a certain location *L2*, I must first move it to an intermediate location *L1*. So wasn't this a case of moving it to *L2* *by means of* first moving it to *L1*, and wasn't that an intentional action too? But this means that the action was not basic, and moreover, the same considerations will apply to the sub-act of moving my hand to *L1*, and so on ad infinitum. However, as I explain in more detail elsewhere (Lynch 2017), the argument trades on the 'by' part of the definition while neglecting another key aspect of it.⁷

According to the standard definition, basic actions are those not done by doing anything *else*. How can we know if this 'anything else' condition is satisfied? I propose the following test, which will be used throughout this paper. Where *S* does *V* by doing *U*, doing *U* counts as doing something else to doing *V* iff '*U*-ing' does not entail '*V*-ing'. Otherwise *U*-ing would hardly be distinct from *V*-ing. To illustrate, consider when I get rid of a fly by waving my hand. Since waving a hand does not entail getting rid of a fly, it counts as a distinct 'doing' from the latter. So my getting rid of the fly was a non-basic action.

⁶ We should note that where one *Vs* by *U*-ing, to describe this as a case of doing one *action* by doing *another action* assumes a particular view of action individuation. On other views, *V*-ing and *U*-ing are different descriptions of the *one* action. With this we should instead speak of basic and non-basic descriptions of the one action, or basic and non-basic things done with it (Hornsby 1980, 68-69). Simply for convenience I will follow the usual practice of speaking of basic/non-basic actions here.

⁷ The response to Lavin and Thompson made here was briefly suggested by Hornsby (2013, 13), but was not developed by her.

Now let *W* be my act of waving my hand to *L2* where the fly was, and divide *W* into sub-acts *X* (moving to *L1*) and *Y* (continuing to *L2*). Here we can say that I did *W* by doing *X*, and doing *X* certainly does not entail doing *W*. But it's false that I did *W* just by doing *X*, since that only got me to *L1*. I did *W* by doing *X and then Y*. However, doing *X* and then *Y* entails doing *W*; they were the parts which together made that whole. So although it's true that I did *W* by means of doing *X* and *Y*, this was not doing something else.

Be that as it may (and for further responses to the Lavin-Thompson criticism, see Martin 1972, 65; Setiya 2012, 288-289), let us assume that there are basic actions to get our investigation going, and the idea will be clarified further as we proceed. We will also mainly work with two examples of apparently basic actions for illustrative purposes, a physical action of raising one's finger⁸, and a mental action of imagining red.

As was suggested, the recent trend of analysing knowing-how in terms of knowing of a way puts in question the common assumption that we can know how to do basic actions. How it might do so is expressed by Paul Snowdon in the following passage:

[I]f S knows how to G then there must be such a thing as the, or a, way to G. Thus S might know how to open a safe, because there is a way to open it which he knows about. By doing the things which are the way, S opens the safe. Now, there are some things we do, and so certainly can do, where there seems to be no such thing as the way we do them. These are called 'basic actions', things we can do but *not* by doing something more basic; there is, in this case, nothing which is our way to do them. It is, of course, controversial which actions they are, but it would be quite inappropriate to say that each of us knows how to blink. In this sort of case it seems that we should say: we can do them, but do not know how to do them (2004, 12).

Similarly, Robert Ware says, 'If I am right about "knowing how" meaning something like "knowing the way", then if there is not a way to do something for us to know, we cannot speak of knowing how to do it' (1973, 158). He then suggests that there are indeed actions for which there are no ways to do them, and offers examples that seem like basic actions, such as

⁸ This example might evade the Lavin-Thompson criticism for a further reason. It's true that to raise or move one's finger *to a certain point* it must pass through an intermediate point. But the act of raising it to the intermediate point is *already* an act of raising one's finger. So there is a difficulty with identifying any sub-act in the action of raising one's finger *simpliciter*.

wiggling one's ear. David Carr (1981, 53) argues similarly, though he speaks of techniques and procedures instead of ways.

Let's call this the Snowdon-Ware or S-W argument, which can be rendered more formally as follows:

P1: If one knows how to do an action, then one knows of a way to do it.

P1* (corollary of P1): There can only be such a thing as knowing how to do an action if there is a way to do that action.

P2: There is no such thing as a way to do a basic action.

C: There is no such thing as knowing how to do a basic action.

This interesting argument appears logically valid. P1* is an immediate consequence of P1. Furthermore, C follows from P1* and P2. P1 is identical to starting claim (1) whose implications we want to determine, so to assess the argument we should turn our attention to P2.

It might be thought that P2 simply follows from the definition of a basic action mentioned earlier. The idea is presumably as follows. A non-basic action is one that is done by doing something else, something 'more basic'. And this 'something else' is the way of doing it. As Rowland Stout expresses this idea:

When we say that you do *A* by doing *B* we mean that doing *B* was the way you did *A*. It is an answer to the question "How?" ... So, saying how you did something is spelling out the way you did something, and we use the word "by" to do this (2005, 138; also see Hornsby 2017, 89).

But since a *basic* action is *not* done by doing anything else, there is *nothing to assume the role of the way to do it*, so P2 is true. And because of this, there is *no answer* 'to the question "How?"', hence the concept of knowing-how has no application in this case. In other words, according to this view, if there is a way to do an action, *V*, then it should be possible to express this fact in a sentence of the form 'One can *V* by *U*-ing', where '*U*' will specify the way to *V*. But since by definition no such sentences can be constructed for basic actions there are no ways of doing them.

But can't we say that for any basic action, you do it by (just) doing it? Isn't that an answer to the how-question, and one that implies that *V*-ing is way to *V*? But the defender of

the S-W argument could argue that treating *V*-ing as a way to *V* has unacceptable consequences. For if *V*-ing is always a way to *V*, we could say that there are ways to do impossible things. For instance, we could say that there is a way to change the past, since you can do it by changing the past (you are *certain* to succeed in doing the former if you do the latter). But surely there is no way to change the past.

Such, at any rate, might be the sort of reasoning informing the S-W argument, and P2 in particular. Though I believe that it goes wrong (as will be shown), it is not completely unattractive. Yet this view stands in contrast to the remarks of Stanley and Williamson, who flatly assert that there *are* ways to do basic actions. Assuming that raising one's arm is one such action, they say that a 'way of raising one's arm is ... demonstrated simply by raising one's arm' (2001, 441, note 46). In their view, all intentional actions, including the most simple and primitive, are actions that one can know how to do (2001, 415; Stanley 2011, 189), and therefore (given their intellectualist theory of knowing-how) are actions concerning which there must be a way to do them.

Clearly the issue of whether there are ways of doing basic actions needs to be investigated further. In the following section we will try to arrive at a deeper understanding of what ways of doing things are to help with this.

3. Ways of doing things

The mentioned justification for P2 seems plausible in the abstract, but I will argue that P2 is nevertheless false, since 'way' is not limited to denoting means or methods of doing things. To facilitate this, however, the idea of a way of doing something will first need to be clarified. The following, then, is an enumeration of different things we can mean when speaking of 'the way to *V*'.

i) Ways as means to an end

You are a bomb disposal expert and know the way to defuse a bomb: cut the blue wire. Here by 'the way' to *V* we mean a method, means or procedure for *causally* bringing about some end result or outcome, expressed by '*V*' (cutting the blue wire caused the defusing of the bomb). Often the result will be something that occurs after carrying out the means, but not always; a way or means to open a door is to push it open, but the act of pushing can be contemporaneous with the door opening. Note also that the end result can be the bringing of a new object into existence. For instance, in knowing the way to make a cake, one knows the procedure that causes a cake to come into existence.

ii) Ways as constitutive steps

You know the right way to do CPR. It consists in doing a series of chest compressions followed by holding the patient's nose, tilting the head back and breathing into the mouth, etcetera, and repeating this over and over. These are the steps involved. Here, the actions involved in the way *constitute* doing CPR. CPR is not something that is caused by or that is an end result of those actions (unlike the patient being revived). It is a process that begins with the first chest compression, and ends with the last. This conception of a way is mereological. But in the limiting case, there may be just a single 'step' that constitutes *V-ing*, for instance, the way to make a bid at an auction is to just raise your hand, and that action, in those circumstances, constitutes bidding.

iii) Ways as sets of rules and objectives

You know the way to play football. Here, there is no particular set of steps to follow that constitute playing football. A football game is not a rigid activity like CPR but can unfold in infinitely many ways. A football game is also not the causal outcome of certain actions. Knowing the way to play seems to consist simply in knowing the rules and objectives of the game (including knowing what paraphernalia are needed to play it).

iv) Ways as routes or directions

Sometimes a way can be a route through an environment, or a direction ('It's a long way from *A* to *B*'; 'The way is blocked'; 'The post-office is that way' [pointing East]). It seems possible, at least in some conversational contexts, that *knowing the way to get to somewhere* can be a matter of knowing the route to it or the direction it is in. You might know, for instance, the way to get to a mountain's summit: a particular route up the southern face. In other contexts, however, knowing a way to get to somewhere could be knowing a means of getting there (e.g., taking a taxi), and a way of this sort goes under category (i).

v) Ways as manners

Actions can often be done in different manners, and these manners constitute ways in which they can be done. Manners are often, though not always, denoted by adverbs. For instance, you can eat a meal quickly, messily, gracefully, or noisily, that is, in a quick, messy, graceful, or noisy manner. And these are all ways that you can eat a meal. So, knowing a way to eat a meal can be knowing a manner in which this can be done, namely, gracefully, noisily,

etcetera. Related to this is the notion of a style of doing something, which seems to come under the idea of manner. For instance, different dancing styles are different manners (and *ipso facto*, different ways) of dancing. But not all manners are styles: eating quickly is a manner of eating, but not an eating style. (Note that this could have been the sense of ‘way’ that Stanley and Williamson were exploiting when they said that there is a way of raising one’s arm.)

vi) Ways as exemplifications

You know a way to imagine red. It is to imagine crimson. Imagining crimson is not a means of imagining red (since red being imagined is not a causal consequence of crimson being imagined). Neither is it a step or series of steps for imagining red (there are no steps involved in imagining red). Neither, obviously, is it a set of rules and objectives, or a route or direction. It is not a manner either; it is infelicitous to speak of imagining red ‘crimsonly’ or ‘in a crimson manner’. Imagining crimson is a way of imagining red simply because crimson is an example or kind of red. Imagining crimson exemplifies imagining red.

It might be thought that cases from (ii) can be subsumed into this category since raising your hand can constitute bidding at an auction just as imagining crimson constitutes imagining red. But there are differences suggesting we should keep these apart. For raising your hand at an auction (understood, as seems natural here, as an act type and not act token) does not *exemplify* a way of bidding at an auction, the way imagining crimson exemplifies imagining red.⁹ Rather, it is *the* way to bid at an auction. Similarly, the steps that constitute doing CPR do not exemplify doing CPR, because they are not one amongst other ways of doing CPR. But imagining crimson is one amongst other ways of imagining red.

Let me briefly relate these points to existing accounts of ways. Actually, this is not a well-developed area of research, but some relevant remarks have been made. Both Bengson and Moffett (2011, 191) and Pavese (2015, 12-13) think that ways are *methods*. Bengson and Moffett then understand methods as ‘sequence[s] of action types’. Pavese, if I understand her correctly, believes that methods consist of steps or task-parts, but she emphasises that they can be ordered sequentially *or synchronically* (which seems right: to unlock an awkward door you might need to pull it towards you and turn the key, two task-parts which must be done

⁹ I am assuming here that types can exemplify other types. This seems unproblematic; we can say ‘The elephant is an example of a mammal’ and ‘The elephant’ here refers to a type.

simultaneously). I agree that sometimes ways are methods and that methods often consist of task-parts or steps, but I suggest that there is an important distinction hiding behind talk of methods or steps: between steps we take that *constitute* the action (as with the dance-steps we take to dance the Tango), and steps we take that are a *means* to bring about some *logically distinct* desired end result (like the steps we take to book a flight online). The terminology of ‘constitutive steps’ and ‘means to an end’ has been used to mark this distinction, and ‘methods’ includes these two ideas.¹⁰ Other thinkers, like Habgood-Coote (2018, 244-245), have distinguished manners from methods as a distinct kind of ways. This is commendable but the above distinctions show that this list can be expanded.

Stanley and Williamson are two other authors who have offered if not a full account of ways then at least a classification of them as properties of token events (2001, 427), where the events in question are presumably actions (see Habgood-Coote 2018, 245). This makes good sense of ways as manners, since manners seem to be properties of actions. However, it does not seem to make sense with respect to the other things ways can be. For instance, a way can also be a route or a direction or a system of rules, but such things are not properties of actions, and ways as steps are not properties of actions either, since steps are themselves actions. I will not offer any alternative classification or definition of ways, however. For the above list—which might not be exhaustive—could suggest that we should instead be ‘pluralists’ about ways. That is to say, the significant variety that we see between what’s referred to with this highly elastic term could suggest that an informative general account of what ways are will not be possible.

But let us get back to our main purpose, and turn to the relevance of the above list to the assessment of the S-W argument. For my main contention here is that some of these notions of ways apply to basic actions, and that therefore it is wrong to think that there are no ways to do basic actions, which is to say, P2 of the S-W argument is false. Most clearly perhaps, the notions of ways as manners and as exemplifications apply to basic actions (this will be defended more rigorously below). For consider our two examples of basic actions: raising your finger and imagining red. One can raise one’s finger quickly or slowly. These are, no doubt, different manners and hence different ways of raising your finger, ways that might apply to all simple physical movements. Basic mental actions are not movements, however.

¹⁰ The word ‘method’ seems more general in its meaning than ‘means’. The steps we take to do CPR, for instance, can be called the method of doing CPR but they cannot be called the means of doing it. Such talk would suggest that CPR is an end result of doing those steps, when in fact CPR is *in process* as one does those steps.

But as the case of imagining red shows, which was done by imagining crimson, there are ways in the exemplification sense of doing some basic mental actions.

Stanley and Williamson seem out of danger then. Since there are ways to do basic actions, their analysis of knowing-how in terms of ways can work for basic actions. But matters are not that simple. For what becomes clear from reflecting on some of the kinds of ways of doing things mentioned above is that knowledge of some of them does not always make one know how to do something. And if the only kinds of ways applicable to basic actions are of that sort then perhaps there cannot be knowledge-how associated with basic actions after all, since then there would be no such thing as a way to do a basic action *in a sense relevant for acquiring knowing-how*. Two things now remain to be done. First we must establish exactly which sorts of ways of doing things apply to basic actions, and then we must see whether knowledge of such ways can make us have knowledge-how.

4. Which sorts of ways apply to basic actions?

In this section we will consider each of the sorts of ways distinguished above to see which apply to basic actions.

Ways as manners: Recall that an action is non-basic iff it's done by doing something else, and basic iff it's not done by doing something else. Now suppose that you raise your finger quickly (in a quick way/manner). But 'quickly' does not designate an action by means of which you raised your finger. It's nonsensical to say you raised your finger by quickness, or by being quick. So the fact that an action was done in a certain manner does not entail that it was done by doing something else. The notion of ways as manners, then, can apply to basic actions.

Ways as exemplifications: We saw that a way to imagine red is to imagine crimson. Suppose that you do this. In that case, you imagined red *by* imagining crimson. Was the action of imagining red, in that case, non-basic? Arguably not, since this was not imagining red by doing *something else*.

Recall our test for establishing whether the 'something else' condition is satisfied: where you *V* by *U*-ing, *U*-ing must not entail *V*-ing. Imagining red by imagining crimson clearly fails this test, since imagining crimson entails imagining red; to imagine crimson *is* to imagine red. Thus on a natural understanding of 'doing something else', you have not imagined red by doing something else here. So there being a way of imagining red in this sense does not prevent it from being a basic action. Our conclusion is that the notion of ways as exemplifications can apply to basic actions.

Ways as means to an end: Consider now when you use a means, which is a kind of method, to bring about an end result. The result is your doing. Moreover, you achieved it *by employing* that means. But does employing a means or method count as ‘doing something else’? We may take this question to mean this: does the description of the means entail the result? I think we will find that generally it does not or need not. For instance, cutting the blue wire is the means for defusing the bomb, but cutting a blue wire does not entail defusing a bomb. CPR is a means for reviving people, but doing CPR does not entail reviving someone. An end result, as I understand it here, is a causal consequence of the employment of the means, so we may expect that means will be logically distinct from their end results. Therefore, if there is a way of doing something in this sense, one does it by doing something else, and the action is non-basic. There are no ways of doing basic actions in this sense.

But suppose someone were to suggest that *V-ing* is a means of *V-ing*. Then we could say that there are means for doing basic actions. However, *V-ing* cannot be a means for *V-ing* if means and end are to be logically distinct and causally related, for *V-ing* is not logically distinct from *V-ing*.

Ways as sets of rules and aims: This notion of a way pertains to rule-governed activities, such as games, ceremonies and rituals. For that reason, it is hard to see how these sorts of ways apply to basic actions; basic actions, such as raising your finger, are not rule-governed activities, which is to say that there are no rules for doing them. Basic actions can certainly be *involved* in rule-governed activities. Games, for instance, can involve basic physical actions, such as raising your hand if you know an answer. But this is a rule for *playing the game*, not for raising your hand.

Ways as routes or directions: It was suggested that at least in some conversational contexts, when we speak of ‘the way to get to *X*’, ‘way’ refers to a route or direction. But this notion of a way applies only to this special case. And acts of getting to places do not seem to be basic actions, since we get to places by walking, driving, or somehow moving along the relevant way to that place. So ways in this sense, apparently, do not apply to basic actions.

Ways as constitutive steps: If there are ways to do an action in this sense then that action is complex, consisting of various steps essentially related to the action. Furthermore, one does it *by doing those steps*. But is this doing *something else*? Consider a relevant example, doing a martial arts kata, which consists of a series of simple physical motions that seem like basic actions in themselves. Is doing those steps doing something different from doing the kata? Certainly, each step considered singly is different from the kata: the individual motions are parts of the kata. But doing all those steps together (in the correct

order) constitutes and entails doing the kata, since a kata is defined in terms of its constituent movements. So doing the kata seems to be, by our assumptions, a basic action, and the notion of ways as steps seems applicable to basic actions.

But should we accept actions exhibiting such complexity as basic actions? The trouble here is that this seems to go against the spirit of that notion, since basic actions were stipulated to be simple (Danto 1965, 147). And part of what this meant was that they have no components that are themselves individual actions (Danto 1970, 109; Martin 1972, 66-67; Weil and Thalberg 1974, 111). So if an action, *V*, consists of various steps, and if steps are discrete actions in themselves, then to remain faithful to the spirit of the notion we should not regard *V* as a basic action.¹¹ Indeed, we could follow Löwenstein here and say that ‘stretches of behavior’ like a kata performance are not actions but *activities* (2017, 15), which *consist* of actions. Either way, we should maintain that the idea of ways as constitutive steps is inapplicable to basic actions.

Note that with steps we are talking about a ‘diachronic’ sort of complexity, but actions might also have a ‘synchronic’ complexity. For instance, one might argue that the martial arts practitioner raising her arms together during the kata consisted of the distinct acts of her raising her left arm and raising her right arm. *If* these are distinct acts (a claim that would need support), then we should say that her raising her arms was not a basic action.

We also looked at a limiting case where doing something consists of a single ‘step’. This was where one bid at an auction by raising one’s finger. If this case is representative, then it only confirms further that ways in this sense shouldn’t apply to basic actions. For the bidding was done by doing something here, and this ‘something’, moreover, was a ‘something else’ (raising one’s finger does not entail bidding at an auction). This renders the action non-basic.

In summary, we have found only two kinds of ways that apply to basic actions, in the sense that basic actions can be done in such ways: ways as manners and as exemplifications. Our next task is to see if that might imply that there can be knowing-how for basic actions.

¹¹ Lavin and Thompson might say that all putative basic actions that are bodily movements consist of steps, namely, the sub-movements that they can always be divided into. However, I think that we would not ordinarily regard such sub-movements as steps proper. Genuine steps, like doing chest-compressions in CPR, seem to have a discreteness that these arbitrarily circumscribed sub-movements lack, and typically have a conventional name, like ‘chest compressions’, which those sub-movements also lack. There is a reasonably determinate answer to the question ‘How many steps are involved in CPR?’, but not to ‘How many steps are involved in raising your finger up two inches?’

5. Do ways as manners and ways as exemplifications matter for acquiring know-how?

Let's sum up the dialectic regarding the S-W argument so far. According to this argument, we cannot know how to do basic actions because there are no ways of doing them. In reply it was shown that this is wrong; there *are* ways of doing basic actions: ways in the manner and exemplification senses. But is this a reason to think we can know how to do basic actions? If it is then presumably it would be due to the following being true. Suppose that *W* is one such way of doing basic action *BA*. Then *W* is such that, if *S* knows that *W* is a way to do *BA*, then *S* knows how to do *BA* (though some might want to add a qualification, such as that *S* must know *W* 'under a practical mode of presentation'). This is just to substitute *W* into the typical sorts of intellectualist accounts framed in terms of knowledge of ways.

The problem is, however, that when we reflect on ways as manners and as exemplifications (especially of the sorts that apply to basic actions, such as doing something quickly), we find little plausibility in the idea that knowledge of them could give one any know-how. This is best seen by reflecting on cases of non-basic action, where everyone agrees there can be knowledge-how.

Consider, for instance, ways as manners. Farrell and Burke work in bomb disposal and are trying to defuse a bomb. Farrell is a veteran and though the bomb has an unusual design, he knows a method (in the sense of a means) for defusing it: cut the blue wire. Burke is a rookie, and does not know any method for defusing this kind of bomb. However, he does know of various manners in which it can be defused, such as quickly, slowly, carefully, calmly or hurriedly. Nevertheless, Burke does not know how to defuse the bomb, while Farrell does. Knowing that it can be defused in these or presumably in any other manner does not make one know how to defuse it. (Habgood-Coote would agree: 'Manners do not figure in practical knowledge ... Knowing that I can open the door gracefully is not sufficient for knowing how to open the door. I need to know a method proposition, like: *that I can open the door by jiggling the key in the lock*' (2018, 245; also see Bianchi, unpublished manuscript, 7)). And this seems to generalize: where *V* is any non-basic action, knowing a manner in which *V* can be done does not make one know how to *V*. But then, if certain basic actions can also be done quickly, slowly, calmly, etcetera, that is hardly a reason for thinking that there can be knowledge-how with those actions. Ways of these sorts do not seem to matter much for knowledge-how.

To put it another way, although the fact that there is a certain method or technique for doing something might imply that there can be knowledge-how with that action (acquirable

through learning or mastering the method or technique), the fact that an action can be done in a certain manner such as quickly does not. If it did, we should be able to find clear cases (with regard to non-basic actions, where it's uncontroversial that there can be knowledge-how) where having knowledge of such manners gives one knowledge-how, but that seems doubtful.

Note that this is not to deny that knowledge of ways as manners can sometimes *contribute* to knowledge-how. For instance, defusing a bomb should be done carefully, and this could be something a bomb disposal expert should know. Similarly, to catch a soon-to-depart train, Jones might need to know that he must do things briskly to not miss it, though first-and-foremost he must know what these things are that need doing (buying a ticket, finding the right platform, etcetera), which is not knowledge of manners.

But this admission is not enough for our opponent; he would need knowledge of ways as manners, either *simpliciter* or in some qualified sense, to be *sufficient* for knowledge-how. To see this more clearly perhaps, let's for argument's sake make a supposition that our opponent could not accept: for there to be knowledge-how for an action, there must be a means for doing that action. In that case, there could be no knowledge-how for basic actions (since there are no means for doing basic actions; if there's a means for doing something, it's done by doing something else). But this supposition is compatible with the point that knowledge of ways as manners can sometimes contribute to one's competence in doing something, as the bomb disposal case shows. So our opponent cannot rest with that point.

Next, consider ways as exemplifications. Suppose that Jones likes Thai cuisine, especially papaya salad. But he does not know how to make a papaya salad. Now papaya salad is an example of a Thai dish. So Jones knows quite well that a way to make a Thai dish is to make a papaya salad. Clearly, however, this does not in itself mean that Jones knows how to make a Thai dish. Other cases also show that knowledge of ways in this exemplification sense does not bestow knowledge-how. One can know that the Tango is an example of a Latin dance, and so know that a way to do a Latin dance is to do the Tango. But merely knowing that does not mean that one knows how to do a Latin dance. The point seems to generalize: where *V-ing* is any non-basic action, and where *A-ing* exemplifies *V-ing*, knowing that *A-ing* is a way of *V-ing* does not make one know how to *V*. For one can know that *A-ing* is a way of *V-ing* without knowing how to *A*.

What sorts of ways *are* relevant for knowing-how then, in the sense that knowledge of such ways can be sufficient for knowledge-how? Answering this question is not necessary for our main purpose, since we need only be concerned with the ways that apply to basic actions.

Nevertheless the question is interesting and a few observations can be made. First, it seems that ways as means to an end are relevant. Farrell, in knowing the right means for defusing the bomb, knew how to defuse it. Ways as constitutive steps probably are too; plausibly, one knows how to do the Tango, or CPR, if one knows the steps. Ways as rules and objectives could be also; it's not implausible to suggest that if one knows the rules for playing snooker, one knows how to play snooker (which isn't to say that one can play it well). And regarding ways as routes or directions, if someone knows the route to somewhere, conversational contexts might occur where it's appropriate to say that she knows how to get there. What these sorts of ways seem to have in common is that they relate to actions of some complexity, which thus require learning, discovery or practice to be able to do.

At this stage Stanley and Williamson might appeal to their notion of practical modes of presentation (PMPs) to defend the idea that knowledge of ways as exemplifications can give one knowledge-how. Accordingly, they might argue that to know how to do a Latin dance, it *is* sufficient to know that doing the Tango is a way of doing a Latin dance, so long as one knows that under a PMP. And this, they might claim, ordinarily involves being able to do the Tango. Then they could assert that, by analogy, one can know how to imagine red by knowing, under a PMP, that imagining crimson is a way to imagine red.

Now many philosophers would consider it unfortunate if to support the thesis that we can know how to do basic actions an appeal had to be made to the idea of PMPs, an idea that has received strong criticism (e.g., Glick 2015), and which, with some exceptions (e.g., Pavese 2015), has not been generally taken up by other intellectualists. Readers probably have their own views about this and here is not the place to add to this debate. What I will say, however, is that appealing to it in this context would appear gratuitous. We have distinguished between different sorts of ways, and among these distinctions, the most immediately obvious candidate for the sort relevant to knowing how to do a Latin dance is ways as constitutive steps, since such dances consist of dance steps that one must learn to learn the dance. Our imagined opponents, however, make the *prima facie* false suggestion that ways as exemplifications are the sorts which are relevant here, and then try to dispel the appearance of falsity by bringing in the additional and controversial apparatus of PMPs. There is little motivation for adopting this less parsimonious, less intuitive/obvious alternative explanation, with its contentious baggage, when an adequate explanation is already available.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have found that though there are ways of doing basic actions, these sorts of ways do not seem to matter much for acquiring knowledge-how, in the sense that we do not acquire knowledge-how by having knowledge of such ways. Therefore, the fact that these ways apply to basic actions is not a reason to think that there can be knowledge-how with basic actions. It will be helpful now to state more formally our rehabilitated version of the S-W argument:

P1: If one knows how to do an action, then one knows of a way to do it in a relevant sense.

P1* (corollary of P1): There can only be such a thing as knowing how to do an action if there is a way to do it in a relevant sense.

P2: There is no such thing as a way to do a basic action in such a sense.

C: There is no such thing as knowing how to do a basic action.

The discussion above hopefully elucidates and justifies the key addition ‘in a relevant sense’. This argument is not conclusive however, even ignoring P1, which was largely just assumed. Some (hopefully reasonable) assumptions were made along the way, such as our assuming that basic actions exist; the debate over this was treated cursorily. Also, the list of distinctions between ways of doing things might not be complete, and if another sense were distinguished we would need to re-examine things. Also, the support for P2 was a kind of burden of proof shifting argument rather than a proof, where a number of cases were presented that suggest that the sorts of ways applicable to basic actions are not the ones that matter for acquiring knowledge-how.

Now as mentioned earlier, there are two ways of reacting to this argument, depending on which of the ‘popular assumptions’—proposition (1) or the affirmative answer to Q—we find most plausible. For advocates of (1), the lesson is supposed to be that there is no basic know-how. I would be of this mind, as (1) has seemed quite plausible to me and, unlike Setiya, I have always felt that there is something dubious about saying that people know how to raise their fingers; this paper was born of a desire to find some philosophical rationale for this intuition. However, for people in this camp our final conclusion might need to be qualified, because there is a tricky class of actions, put aside up until now, that require some further comments.

The examples of basic actions that have been presented throughout this paper have been actions of a very rudimentary kind, of the sort that Danto called ‘gifts’. However, some philosophers (e.g., Martin 1972) hold that actions that require *learning, practice* or *training* can also be basic actions, actions like tying a necktie, writing one’s signature, or blessing oneself. The idea here is that though when we first start learning these actions we might need to attentively perform the individual steps, when we become proficient at them we perform them automatically, without thinking of the individual aspects, steps or parts. The action then becomes an individual intentional action, a single smooth performance, which consists of no discrete *intentional* steps or means (given certain assumptions about the individuation of intentional action). Though they started out as non-basic actions, they became basic actions as the agent became proficient at them.

What are we to think of these? In blessing herself for the ten thousandth time, the Christian does it by doing various things (touching her forehead, then left shoulder, then right etcetera), but depending on our criteria of action we might not consider these to be intentional actions (Martin would maintain they are just doings (1972, 63)) and the blessing might then be a single basic action. But then there would be ways of doing some basic actions in the method sense, since there is certainly a method for blessing oneself. Further, the method sense of ‘ways’ is relevant for the acquisition of knowledge-how and we should not deny that you can know how to do any action for which there is a method. Thus we would then need to reformulate P2 and C, something like as follows:

P2: There is no such thing as a way to do *certain kinds* of basic action in such a sense.

C: There is no such thing as a knowing how to do *certain kinds* of basic actions.

The relevant kinds could then be called *rudimentary* basic actions: actions of the sort that there are ways to do them only in the know-how-irrelevant manner and exemplification senses. These are the sorts of actions that typically require no learning or practice to be able to do (because there is no method, steps or rules to learn or practice), and which would not naturally be regarded as a manifesting skill or intelligence (we do not apply Ryle’s so-called intelligence epithets, ‘cunning’, ‘inventive’, ‘prudent’ etcetera (see 1949/2009, 14-15) to arms raisings *qua* arm raisings, and the like).

Alternatively, one might hold that the conclusion of this argument is so absurd that it can be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of proposition (1). I suspect that this approach might appeal to Setiya and Hornsby. Setiya (2012) and Hornsby (2007) take it as a datum, or as true

for some independent reasons, that there is basic knowledge-how, and then argue that cases of basic action are counterexamples to an intellectualist theory of knowledge-how (for those authors, the lack of means or methods with basic actions makes an intellectualist approach to them problematic). In their view, knowing how to do non-basic actions is or at least heavily depends upon propositional knowledge (Hornsby 2007, 178-179; Setiya 2012, 296), but this is not so for basic actions.

Besides briefly trying to convey the plausibility of proposition (1) and the intellectualist interpretation of it, I have said little here to exclude this alternative. But for someone taking this line, an important project would be to elucidate the connection between ways and knowing-how (for surely there is some connection) from an anti-intellectualist perspective. If this connection is not as the intellectualists say it is, what is it exactly? Anti-intellectualists have so far had quite little to say about ways in their positive theory.

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