KNOWING-THEAT, KNOWING-HOW, AND KNOWING PHILOSOPHICALLY

Stephen HETHERINGTON
University of New South Wales

Summary
This paper outlines how we may understand knowing-that as a kind of knowing-how-to, and thereby as an ability. (Contrast this form of analysis with the more commonly attempted reduction, of knowing-how-to to knowing-that.) The sort of ability in question has much potential complexity. In general, questioning can, but need not, be part of this complexity. However, questioning is always an element in the complexity that is philosophical knowing. The paper comments on the nature of this particular form of knowing.

The conception of knowing as being, most fundamentally, knowing-that continues to dominate epistemological analyses of knowledge. But it need not. This paper highlights a conceptual alternative, which is then applied to the potentially special case of philosophical knowledge. A person’s skill in questioning will be seen to contribute constitutively and essentially to the nature of such knowledge.

1. A standard conception of knowing

Vigorous epistemological debates persist as to the nature of what it is to know that p. Vigorous, yes; but exhaustive, no: some commitments are rarely, if ever, questioned even within these debates. A few of those persisting commitments are clearly displayed in the following standard, albeit generic, picture of knowing that p, a picture that has become an epistemological reflex:

To know that p is to be in a state of knowing that p. Most typically, this is deemed to be a state of accurately believing that p, a state possessing
precise boundaries\textsuperscript{1} and constituted in part by some further specific ‘knowledge-making’ properties.\textsuperscript{2}

For example, the belief will have been reliably formed; or it will be evidentially well supported; and so forth. The belief is the single ‘thing’ or ‘substance’ which is the knowledge ‘within’ the knower. It would be knowledge by having these further properties.

2. \textit{An epistemic diaspora}

Section 1’s generic picture of knowing should be familiar to epistemological readers (especially Western analytic epistemologists). Even so, I wish to question a few aspects of it. If my generic counter-picture is correct, as far as it goes,\textsuperscript{3} then there is no single ‘thing within’ that is the knowledge (even once appropriate further properties are present). Nor will knowing be a state, or at least not one as simple as a belief that \( p \).\textsuperscript{4} Nor also will knowing be the right kind of thing clearly to have precise boundaries. (So, will there be the possibility of a person’s knowledge that \( p \) and her knowledge that \( q \) blurring somewhat into each other, partially overlapping? Maybe; which sounds correct to me.) The epistemological stakes are therefore high.

We begin carefully, then, by reflecting on the fact that knowing that \( p \) both expresses and generates \textit{many} cognitive outcomes. Accurate believing is one of these; only one, though. I will call this grouping \( p \)’s \textit{epistemic diaspora}. It includes something like the following listing of \( p \)-related cognitive phenomena:\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1} For more on this aspect of the usual epistemological picture, see Hetherington (2006b).

\textsuperscript{2} In other words, a true belief that \( p \) is rarely thought to be sufficient for knowing that \( p \). For dissenting voices, see Sartwell (1991; 1992); Goldman (1999, 23–5); Hetherington (2001, ch. 4; 2007a).

\textsuperscript{3} Elsewhere (2006a; 2007b), I have presented similarly motivated outlines of the metaphysics of knowing. Each includes and emphasizes further details within what is at present a developing conception of the nature of knowing.

\textsuperscript{4} This is not to say that believing that \( p \) is absolutely simple. I said ‘as simple’ — \textit{however} simple that might be. On some conceptual options available for understanding the nature of believing, see Armstrong (1973, Part I).

\textsuperscript{5} I am rendering these as \textit{success} phenomena, with each including a related accuracy condition. I take accuracy to be the most central feature of knowing, in whatever form(s) such accuracy might take. As to what form(s) it \textit{would} take, note that in the case of questioning, for example, some questioning does, while some does not, respond to aspects of the pertinent truth