

Journal of Philosophy, Inc.

Amazing Knowledge

Author(s): Stephen Schiffer

Source: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (Apr., 2002), pp. 200-202

Published by: Journal of Philosophy, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655616>

Accessed: 10/03/2010 09:38

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=jphil>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Journal of Philosophy, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Philosophy*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

AMAZING KNOWLEDGE

One of the goals of stem-cell research is supposed to be to enable us to learn how stem cells divide to become specialized cells. But we already have this knowledge. Let me explain.

Assume that knowing is a relation to Russellian propositions, structured entities whose basic components are the objects and properties our knowledge is about. Knowing is either a *triadic* relation that holds among a knower, a Russellian proposition the knower knows, and a mode of presentation under which the knower knows the proposition, or else it is a *dyadic* relation that holds between a knower and the Russellian proposition she knows, where this dyadic relation is explicable in terms of a triadic relation, $KNO(x, p, m)$, which behaves just as knowing would behave if it were a triadic relation. In either case, we may speak of someone's knowing a proposition under one mode of presentation but not under another. Lois Lane, for example, knows the proposition that Superman/Clark Kent flies under a mode of presentation that requires thinking of Superman/Clark Kent as a guy who goes around in a caped spandex outfit but not under a mode of presentation that requires thinking of him as a bespectacled nerd.

Some modes of presentation are not at all like the one just invoked in the Lois Lane example; they are *practical* modes of presentation not easily put into words but ones with which a person may be *en rapport* in certain practical ways. For example, if w is a way in which a mechanism works, and that mechanism is at work in you, then there is ipso facto a practical mode of presentation m of the proposition that w is a way in which the mechanism works such that you know, under m , that w is a way in which the mechanism works.

Now, let w_s be the way in which stem cells divide to become specialized cells. It follows, then, that for each and every one of us there is some practical mode of presentation m such that one knows, under m , that w_s is a way stem cells divide to become specialized cells.

You are right to doubt that we know any such thing. If asked to justify your skepticism, you would no doubt appeal to the following facts:

- (a) Typically, if a person knows p —and thus knows it under some mode of presentation or other—she is also able to assert p , where this entails the ability assertively to utter a sentence that, in the context

of utterance, expresses p . Thus, although Lois Lane is not in a position to say 'Clark Kent flies', she is in a position to say 'Superman flies'. But none of us can produce a sentence that expresses the proposition that w_s is a way stem cells divide to become specialized cells.

- (b) We are not given the slightest clue as to what "practical modes of presentation" are like.
- (c) If you know that such-and-such, then someone who has both knowledge of all the facts relevant to your knowing that such-and-such and mastery of our concept of knowledge-that should recognize that you know that such-and-such. To imagine otherwise is sort of like imagining that there might be horses such that no one could know them to be horses however much one knew about those creatures. Yet it is clear that however much you learn about the situation of each and every person with respect to stem-cell specialization, no one with mastery of our concept of knowledge-that would credit any of us with knowledge that w_s is a way in which stem cells divide to become specialized cells. That is simply not how we deploy 'knows that'. Indeed, one who uses 'knows that' with its ordinary meaning would, given the stipulated facts, *deny* that anyone knows how stem cells divide to become specialized cells; nothing in the situation resembles anything that would ordinarily be taken as evidence for the amazing knowledge claim.

Mozart wrote the symphony K. 16 when he was eight years old. Clyde, a chicken-sexer, is able to look at a one-day old chick and straightway know its sex, although he says he has no idea how he is able to do that. Let w_m be the way in which eight-year-old Mozart wrote K. 16, and let w_c be the way Clyde is able to tell the sex of a chick. Now consider the claim that there are "practical modes of presentation" m and m' such that eight-year-old Mozart knew, under m , that w_m was a way to write K. 16 and Clyde knows, under m' , that w_c is a way to discern the sex of a chick. The reasons just displayed for doubting we have the knowledge in question about stem cells also apply to the knowledge claims about Mozart and Clyde. I conclude that eight-year-old Mozart no more knew that w_m was a way to write K. 16 and Clyde no more knows that w_c is a way to discern the sex of a chick than we know that w_s is a way stem cells divide to become specialized cells.

If I am right about Mozart and Clyde, then Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson are wrong when, in "Knowing How,"¹ they claim that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that. For they accept the account of knowledge sketched above and they claim that, if x knows

¹ This JOURNAL, xcviii, 8 (August 2001): 411-44.

how to Φ , then there is a practical mode of presentation m and a way w of Φ ing such that x knows, under m , that w is a way to Φ . And eight-year-old Mozart certainly knew how to write K. 16, and Clyde knows how to tell the sex of a one-day old chick.

Stanley and Williamson cannot escape attributing the propositional knowledge in question to Mozart and to Clyde; nor can they reasonably deny that the displayed reasons for doubting we have the mooted propositional knowledge about stem cells also apply to the knowledge claims about Mozart and Clyde. At the same time, the stem-cell case does not involve knowledge-how, whereas Mozart knew how to write K. 16 and Clyde knows how to tell the sex of a one-day old chick, and Stanley and Williamson have adduced some linguistic evidence in support of the claim that ascriptions of knowledge-how are ascriptions of propositional knowledge. Well, we have to weigh their linguistic evidence against the fact that the reasons for doubting that we know that w_s is a way in which stem cells divide to become specialized cells apply as well to the claim that eight-year-old Mozart knew that w_m was a way to write the symphony K. 16 and to the claim that Clyde knows that w_c is a way to discern the sex of a chick. I dare say, my own bookkeeping is unfavorable to Stanley and Williamson.

STEPHEN SCHIFFER

New York University