

BETH A. BARKER

Department of Philosophy
Northwestern University
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RESEARCH

Areas of specialization Philosophy of mind, action, epistemology

Areas of competence Cognitive science, applied ethics (animal ethics, bioethics), logic

EDUCATION

PhD, in progress, Philosophy, Northwestern University expected defense: July 2025
Dissertation: *A Practical Guide to Know-How*
Committee: Sandy Goldberg (chair), Jennifer Lackey, Baron Reed, Will Small (external,
University of Illinois at Chicago)

MA, Philosophy, University of Missouri 2018

BA, Philosophy, Spanish, Summa Cum Laude, Evangel University 2015

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

I establish a novel view of the debate about knowledge-how and confront its core assumption: that knowing how to ϕ , for any activity ϕ , is or requires a distinctively practical kind of knowledge. I argue that there's no such thing as 'knowledge-how', or a distinctively practical kind of knowledge, and the reason is that ordinary propositional knowledge is already practical in all the ways we wanted knowledge-how to be. I call the resulting view 'Practical Intellectualism'. In a slogan: *all knowledge is practical knowledge*.

PUBLICATIONS

'Knowing how and being able' 2024
Synthese 204, no. 76: pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-024-04707-8>

'Epistemic Injustice and Performing Know-How' 2021
Social Epistemology 35, no. 6: pp. 608–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2021.1882608>

WORKS IN PROGRESS

'The Knowledge Objection to Know-How' (under revision for 'revise and resubmit' at
Mind)

‘Intellectualism and Nonhuman Animal Knowledge’ (‘honorable mention’ for Philosophy of Animal Minds and Behavior Association Prize 2025)

‘There’s No Such Thing as Knowledge-How’ (under review)

‘How to Over-Intellectualize Know-How’ (under revision)

PRESENTATIONS

(peer reviewed)

‘Intellectualism and Nonhuman Animal Knowledge’ April 2025
Philosophy of Animal Minds and Behavior Association, University of California, Santa Barbara

‘How Knowledge-How Is Practical: Two Theses’ 2024
Submitted Symposium, American Philosophical Association (APA) Central Division Meeting, New Orleans

‘What Should an Account of Knowledge-How Be an Account Of?’ 2024
Submitted Symposium, APA Eastern Division Meeting, New York

‘Propositions in Action: The Problem of Over-Intellectualizing Know-How’ 2023
Rule-Following: Between Nature and Culture, University of Hradec Králové

‘Propositions in Action: The Problem of Over-Intellectualizing Know-How’ 2023
Concepts in Action: Representation, Language, and Applications, Concordia University

‘Ryle’s Regress from Category Mistake’ 2022
Normative Guidance Workshop, Australian National University

‘Epistemic Injustice and Intellectualist Know-How’ 2019
Submitted Symposium, APA Central Division Meeting, Denver

INVITED COMMENTARIES

Kyoungmin Cho, ‘Against Subjectivism about Final Ends: The Fickleness Argument’ 2023
Northwestern Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics (NUSTEP), Northwestern University

Ian Dunkle, ‘Can an Action be Difficult beyond Compare?’ 2023
APA Central Division Meeting, Denver

Keshav Singh, ‘The Paradox of Consequentialism’ 2022
NUSTEP, Northwestern University

Ben Henke, ‘Degree Encroachment’ 2021
12th Annual NU/ND Graduate Epistemology Conference, University of Notre Dame

Ofra Magidor, ‘Meaning Transfer Revisited’ 2018
Kline Workshop on Semantics and Logic, University of Missouri

Bob Fischer, 'Veganism, Vegetarianism, and the Duty to Signal' Kline Workshop on Animal Ethics, University of Missouri	2018
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AWARDS

Philosophy of Animal Minds and Behavior Association (PAMBA), travel funding	2025
American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT) (\$300 to participate in the AAPT Teaching and Learning Seminar and conference)	2024
Graduate Writing Center Fellowship Northwestern University	2023-2024
Normative Guidance Workshop, travel funding Australian National University	2022
Scott T. Davey Memorial Prize for Excellence in M.A. Research Awarded for 'Epistemic Injustice and Intellectualist Know-How', University of Missouri	2018

TEACHING

(* = upcoming)

Primary Instructor

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

*Ability and Disability	2025
Theory of Knowledge	2025
*Critical Thinking	2024, 2025

Loyola University Chicago

Philosophy and Persons	2022, 2023
Judgment and Decision-Making (intermediate)	2021

University of Missouri

Introduction to Ethics	2018, 2019
Introduction to Bioethics	2019
Introduction to Philosophy	2018

Teaching Assistant

Northwestern University

Introduction to Moral Philosophy	2025
Elementary Logic I	2024
Modern Philosophy (intermediate)	2021, 2023
Introduction to Philosophy	2023
Theory of Knowledge (intermediate)	2023
Elementary Logic II (intermediate)	2022
Bioethics	2021

University of Missouri

Medical Ethics	2018
Logic and Reasoning	2017
Introduction to Philosophy	2017
Introduction to Ethics	2016

Fellow

Northwestern University

Graduate Writing Center (advised graduate student and faculty writing, led writing workshops)	2023-2024
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GRADUATE COURSEWORK

(NU = Northwestern University; MU = University of Missouri)

Language, Epistemology, Mind

Reasoning and representation (audited; L. Rips, NU Department of Psychology); Higher-order evidence (S. Goldberg, NU); Philosophy of inquiry (S. Goldberg, NU); Legal epistemology (J. Lackey, NU); Seminar in language and mind (M. Glanzberg, NU); The modal future (F. Cariani, NU); Epistemic modality (P. Weirich, MU); Self-knowledge (M. McGrath, MU); Knowledge-how (P. Markie, MU); Formal Semantics (A. Radulescu, MU); Semantics (A. Radulescu, MU); Pragmatics (C. Horisk, MU)

History

Belief and doubt in early modern philosophy (B. Reed, NU); Creaturely life before—and against—Descartes (L. Shannon, NU Department of English); Knowledge, persuasion, and power in ancient philosophy (P. Marechal, NU); Understanding and reason in Kant (R. Zuckert, NU); Russell and Wittgenstein (D. Sievert, MU); Locke's metaphysics (M. Folescu, MU); Aristotle's ethics (N. Baima, MU)

Social and Political, Ethics, Value

Group-based morality (S. White, NU); Derrida/Agamben (A. Ricciardi & I. Alfandary, NU); Topics in aesthetics: Sublimity, ugliness, and horror (R. Zuckert, NU); Critical phenomenology of race, gender, sexuality (J. Medina, NU); Ideal and non-ideal theory (K. Ebels-Duggan, NU); Habermas's theory of communicative rationality (C. Lafont, NU); Political authority and anarchy (P. Vallentyne, MU)

Logic and Metaphysics

The classical limitative results (S. Ebels-Duggan, NU); Seminar in logic (P. Weirich, MU)

SERVICE

Co-organizer, Northwestern/Notre Dame Graduate Epistemology Conference since 2022

Co-organizer, Graduate Works in Progress 2022-2024
(graduate students present and discuss work in early stages of development)
Northwestern University, Department of Philosophy

President , Philosophy Graduate Student Association (PGSA) Northwestern University	2022-2023
Climate Committee Member Northwestern University, Department of Philosophy	2021-2022
Graduate Leadership and Advocacy Council Representative , PGSA Northwestern University	2021-2022
Tea-Time Coordinator , PGSA Northwestern University, Department of Philosophy	2021
President , Philosophy Department Graduate Student Organization (GSO) University of Missouri	2018-2019
Philosophy Department Representative , Graduate Professional Council University of Missouri	2017-2018
Treasurer , Philosophy Department GSO University of Missouri	2017-2018

LANGUAGES

English - native

French - intermediate/advanced

Spanish - intermediate/advanced

ASL - beginning

REFERENCES

Sanford Goldberg, Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities
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Will Small, Associate Professor
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CV updated April 2025

Parties to the debate about know-how tend to agree that knowing how to φ , for any activity φ , is a matter of having a distinctively practical kind of knowledge regarding φ . They just disagree about how to characterize this knowledge. Intellectualists argue that know-how is practical *propositional* knowledge. And anti-intellectualists argue that it's an intelligent ability or disposition that amounts to a practical kind of *non-propositional* knowledge.

In four stand-alone papers, I establish a novel view of the debate and argue that it gives us no reason to think there must be a *distinctively* practical kind of knowledge. In a slogan, the view I develop and defend, *Practical Intellectualism*, is that all knowledge is practical knowledge.

In 'What is "Knowledge-How"?', I show that the debate about know-how contains two explanatory projects. One is to characterize the state of S that makes claims like 'S knows how to φ ' apt. I call this the 'Practical Knowledge Project' (PKP). The other is to characterize the interaction between S's state (their 'know-how') and their performance—to answer the questions, *When S φ s, how does S's know-how inform their φ -ing? What makes their φ -ing intelligent, when it is?* I call this the 'Intelligent Action Project' (IAP). Broadly speaking, intellectualists take up PKP, and anti-intellectualists take up IAP. The upshot is that insofar as parties to the 'debate' take up distinct explanatory aims, they're not at odds about the nature of knowing how to φ , but about what 'knowledge-how' picks out: a state or its application.

Establishing this view of the debate allows me to address two prominent patterns of objection and response. In 'The Knowledge Objection to Know-How', I confront a persistent objection to anti-intellectualism, which I call 'the Knowledge Objection', or KO. According to KO, anti-intellectualism is an inadequate view of 'knowledge-how' because it equates knowing how to φ with being able to φ and thereby fails to amount to a view of a kind of *knowledge*, properly speaking. I develop and defend a novel response to KO: KO *doesn't apply* because contemporary anti-intellectualism isn't a view about 'knowledge-how'. Anti-intellectualism is better understood as a view of what's involved in our exercises of intelligence.

The most persistent complaint against intellectualism, on the other hand, is that it over-intellectualizes know-how. In 'How to Over-Intellectualize Know-How', I find that the worry behind this complaint is misplaced. The intellectualist runs no risk of over-intellectualizing 'knowledge-how', since the risk arises at a point outside of the intellectualist's purview: what it is to *apply* knowledge to action (IAP). Insofar as the intellectualist is invested in PKP, the concern that they 'over-intellectualize knowledge-how' doesn't apply.

The final paper, 'There's No Such Thing as Knowledge-How', dispenses with the myth that knowing how to φ is, or requires, a distinctively practical kind of knowledge. In place of an account of distinctively practical knowledge, I develop and defend a novel view of what makes 'S knows how to φ ' apt. This is the view I call 'practical intellectualism': 'S knows how to φ ' is apt when S has the ordinary propositional knowledge they need in order to φ . Ordinary propositional knowledge is already practical in all the ways we wanted 'knowledge-how' to be. It turns out that there's no such thing as 'knowledge-how'.