Possibilism: ability is an ordinary species of restricted possibility: *agentive possibility,* possibility to act.

(1)

a. Ava is able to wiggle her ears.
b. Ava can wiggle her ears.
c. It is possible for Ava to wiggle her ears.
d. Ava has the ability to wiggle her ears.

Against Possibilism (Kenny 1976):

P1. If ability were a species of ordinary restricted possibility, it would have a normal modal logic.
P2. Ability does not have a normal modal logic.
P3. Ability is not a species of ordinary restricted possibility.

Why believe P2?

(2)

a. I'm able to hit the dart board.
b. I'm able to hit the top or hit the bottom.
c. I'm able to hit the top or I'm able to hit the bottom.

Thought: (2a) can be true when (2c) is not. But if ability had a normal modal logic, (2a) entail (2c).

Kable: For every agent S, for all actions A,B: If S is unable not to B if they A, then if S is able to A, S is able to B.

Distribution: For every agent S, for all actions A,B: If S is able to A or B, then S is either able to A or S is able to B.

My own quantified version of the puzzle presents clearer data:

(3)

a. I'm able to raise my voice but not by a precise decibel level.
b. I'm able to hit the dartboard but not a precise point.
c. I'm able to wiggle my ears but not at a precise speed.

The problem:

P1. I'm able to raise my voice.
P2. I'm not able to raise my voice without raising it by a precise decibel level.
C. I'm able to raise my voice by a precise decibel level.

P1 entails C given **K**able (or weaker closure principle!). Yet (3a) is coherent and arguably true.

Natural thought: scope?

(4) I'm able to raise my voice by some precise decibel level or other.
(5) There is a particular precise decibel level by which I'm able to raise my voice.

C is true on the reading in (4). (3a) is true on the reading in (5). The puzzle dissolves.

Problem for the Possibilists: (4) entails (5), given modest auxiliary assumptions.

But: there is at least *a* reading on which claims like (4b) appear to be strictly stronger than (4a). Call this the "enriched reading" (no prejudice as to whether syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic).

For debate in the literature:

Q1. What is the content of the enriched readings?
Q2. What is the linguistic mechanism by which these enrichments are generated?

Quick note on Q2: Similar profile to scalar inferences: (i) defeasible but (ii) generated *locally*, which is usually taken to rule out a pragmatic account (though see Simons 2007).

My proposal on Q1: Sentences of the form '*S* is can/is able to *V*' are (defeasibly) enriched with an attitude adverb, something like 'intentionally'.

(6)

a. I'm able to intentionally raise my voice by some precise decibel level or other.
b. There is a particular precise decibel level by which I'm able to intentionally raise my voice.

As desired, (5a) does not entail (5b). We dissolve the puzzle as described above.

Other proposals:

- The enriched reading features an objective necessity modal: 'Possible for *S* to *necessitate* that they *V*' (Horty & Belnap 1995; Fusco 2020; Santorio fc).
- The enriched reading features an epistemic adverb: 'Possible for *S* to *V transparently*', i.e., to *V* while *knowing/believing justifiably* that they will V (Schwarz 2020).

Argument from luck: Initially, the enriched reading seems to rule out *any amount* of luck:

(7)

a. ?Ava is able to win tonight's lottery.
b. ?Ava is able to lose tonight's lottery.

This hypothesis is not borne out. Although luck is required, (7a)-(7c) are fine:

(8)

a. Pujols [unlike X] is able to hit a home run on this strike.
b. Mahomes [unlike Y] is able to complete this pass.
c. Messi [unlike Z] is able to score this penalty kick.

Puzzling for necessity-enrichment, whether circumstantial or epistemic! By contrast, intentional action patterns with ability reports here.

(9)

a. ?Ava intentionally won tonight's lottery.
b. ?Ava intentionally lost tonight's lottery.

(10)

a. Pujols intentionally hit a home run (Carter & Shepherd 2023).
b. Mahomes intentionally completed this pass.
c. Messi intentionally scored this penalty kick.

Mele (2003): abilities to do things intentionally vs. abilities which give one normative standing.

Though able to complete the pass, Mahomes is not in a position to *promise* he'll complete it.

Puzzling: if you know you'll do it, why shouldn't you be in a position to promise to do it?

Logic of ability

It is important that what gets enriched is the *verb phrase*. (11) is indeed false, but it is <u>not an instance</u> of (enriched) **Distribution**.

(11) If S is able to intentionally (hit the top or hit the bottom), then S is able to intentionally hit the top or S is able to intentionally hit the bottom.

The genuine instance of **Distribution** is (12), which is true.

(12) If S is able to (intentionally hit the top or to intentionally hit the bottom), then S is able to intentionally hit the top or S is able to intentionally hit the bottom.

Similar points apply to **K**able.

Other modals

If what gets enriched is the VP, should we not suspect inexactness in other modalities?

(13)

a. ??You may raise your voice, but not by a precise decibel level.
b. ??She might raise her voice, but not by a precise decibel level.

Context will help: e.g. burn-out clinic.

Abominal conjunctions

(14) ??She's not able to raise her voice by precisely 20db, but she might.

Why no felicitous non-uniformly enriched reading? Better: "… it might *happen* that she will."