

Causation and the logic of ability
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Against linguistic accounts which treat it as a special case of circumstantial possibility, ability modals fail to verify key axioms of alethic modality: a claim of ability is not licensed by a single witness for its prejacent, and ability modals do not freely distribute over disjunction. The philosophical literature includes a number of "conditional" or "hypothetical" analyses of ability which aim to address these logical patterns by representing ability as a necessity modal conditioned on some attempt or action by the agent of ability; while these approaches can make sense of the logic of ability, they leave open the nature of the connection between the conditioning action and the ability target. I suggest that this connection is best analyzed in terms of causal dependence, arguing that a complex causal structure for ability allows us to make good on a number of puzzles associated with the interpretation of ability ascriptions across languages, including the phenomenon of actuality entailments from perfectly-marked ability modals and the apparent genericity of present or imperfectly-marked ability.